ISSN 1908-5567

BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO de FILIPINAS

Vol. LXXXIV, No. 864 *January-February 2008*



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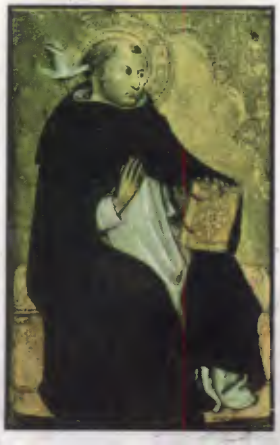

BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO DE FILIPINAS

The Official Interdiocesan Bulletin

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BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO DE FILIPINAS, the Official Interdiocesan Organ, is published bi-monthly by the University of Santo Tomas and is printed at UST Publishing House, Manila, Philippines. Entered as Second Class Mail Matter at the Manila Post Office on June 21, 1946 and Re-entered at the UST Post Office on October 23, 1996.

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

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Subscription Rates (Effective September 2006)

	One Year	*Per Copy*
Philippines	Php900.00	Php150.00
Foreign: (via Air Mail)	US$150.00	US$25.00

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

Address all communications to:
BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO DE FILIPINAS
Ecclesiastical Publications Office
University of Santo Tomas
España Blvd., Manila 1015 Philippines
Tel. No.: (63-2) 406-1611 local 8251 • Telefax: (63-2) 740-9710
E-mail: eccpubli@mnl.ust.edu.ph

ISSN 1908-5567

VOL. LXXXIV, NO. 864 JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2008

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EDITORIAL

Praying Not to Lose the Faith

ROLANDO V. DE LA ROSA, OP

Once, I read a story about a car accident that happened somewhere. Many curious bystanders had surrounded the lone casualty. A TV reporter shouted: "Let me through, I am the father of the victim." The crowd parted. He continued shouting, "I am the father of the victim", until he saw, to his embarrassment that the victim was a monkey.

It pays to tell the truth. St. Thomas Aquinas (whose feast day we celebrate on January 28) is one saint whom I like to remember not only because of his holiness and wisdom, but also because he is one saint whose respect for truth permeated everything that he did. In fact, he saw himself as a servant of truth.

He understood the meaning of "servant" in its feudal context: someone who is at the service of his master; or someone who gives himself as a gift to another in complete surrender. It is remarkable that this consummate

thinker and believer whose works remain unparalleled in depth and clarity, admitted that he daily prayed *that he might not lose the faith.*

An excellent theologian praying not to lose the faith! For Thomas this humble admission was born out of his boundless respect for the faith he professed. "Not to lose the faith" meant, on the one hand, praying that his ideas might not cheapen the truth about God; that he might not present as God's word what is in fact its very human expression. On the other hand, it also meant that a theologian ought never to present God's word in a way that is naive and ludicrous to the non-believer. In modern terms, this implies the necessity of reinterpretation or adaptation of the content of one's faith. It also entails respect for the sensitivity of others and their ability to distinguish between God's revealing word and human speculations.

St. Thomas's solicitude for not losing the faith also explains the fact that he battled daily on two fronts as a theologian. On one front, he fought against facile *accommodation* that would make a farce out of genuine dialogue. St. Thomas constructed a new Christian synthesis making use of ideas of various authors considered unorthodox during his time, but without sacrificing the integrity of the contents of his faith. On the second front he fought against those whose obsession for orthodoxy led them into excessive *intolerance* against any development in doctrine. He also fought against those who thought that truth is transfixed in time and space, incapable of authentic renewal.

On his deathbed, St. Thomas was said to have asked to receive Holy Communion and when it was brought to him, he adored it, saying at length these wonderful words, "I receive thee, the price of my soul's redemption, I receive thee for whose love *(pro cuius amore)* I have studied, kept vigil, worked, preached and taught."

Pro cuius amore. The secret of his total dedication to truth was love. Neither ivory-tower scholarship, ambition nor intellectual curiosity could explain his devotion to study, but the generous love for a living person, our Lord Jesus Christ. St. Thomas believed that truth was not merely an object of knowledge, not merely an idea, not even a thing, but a living person to be loved. As an inexhaustible mystery, God is not a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be revered.

Thomas Aquinas, Vatican II and Contemporary Theology

C.J. PINTO DE OLIVEIRA, O.P.*

At critical periods in its history, the church becomes aware in new ways of the presence of the great witnesses within its tradition. The Spirit renews the church by a fresh understanding of the Gospel, and in the light of this eschatological gift the future opens up as call and promise. The past, the teachings of the Fathers and Doctors, unfold new meanings and messages as they respond to the new challenges and problems of the present. Vatican II was precisely such an unfolding: the Council wanted to incorporate a stance regarding St. Thomas into its basic design and into its most fruitful and dynamic objective, the re-

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reading of Scripture and Tradition. It deliberately refused to ratify any expression which would give even the appearance of setting the universal Doctor apart in splendid isolation or of canonizing his doctrine as a closed system.

To be sure, Vatican II and the post-conciliar Church were sensitive to the climate of suspicion which today is inclined to discredit all systems of thought. Thus a page in the history of Thomism seems to have been turned, that of philosophical and theological systematizations. The "return to St. Thomas" undertaken in the pontificate of Pius IX inaugurated that development which the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* of Leo XIII was to honor in 1879. On the other hand, inspired by the Council, a new form of relevancy seemed to open up for the theology of St. Thomas. It appeared as a challenge, as a promise of unprecedented hope in the framework of conversing with contemporary thought in the perspective of an ecumenical and structural dialog. The following article will pursue this itinerary:

1. The vicissitudes of Thomism and the presence of Thomas Aquinas in the chief directions of the Second Vatican Council;

2. Questions and issues coming from major currents of contemporary theology;

3. A look at recent theological projects, principally existential, historical and liberation theologies.

A. Thomas Aquinas, Conciliar Questions and Directions

Two questions, separate but equally important, should be raised first. What use did the Council make of Aquinas' teaching? What position did it take regarding the place

Thomas Aquinas was to occupy henceforth in ecclesiastical teaching?

1. Thomism at the Council

A comparison with the two previous Councils, Trent and Vatican I, is significant. While announcing their intention to remain above the quarrels and details of the theological schools, the Fathers of the Council of Trent borrowed from the theological *Summa* of Thomas the essential and fundamental ideas of their entire dogmatic development. The doctrine of sanctifying grace underlying the decree on *Justification* is a resume of Thomistic teaching brought up to date. This, in turn, becomes the main text of the decree where the Council's sacramental and ecclesiological positions are collected.[1] More cautiously but not less effectively, Thomas Aquinas supplied Vatican I with ideas on faith, revelation and on the relationships of both to human reason; and with the theological foundations of the dogmatic constitution *Dei Filius* which was intended to offer the starting point and the basis for the whole conciliar work but was never finished.[2]

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[1] A. Walz pointed this out in his study "La giustificazione tridentina. Note sul debattito e sul decreto conciliare," *Angelicum* 28 (1951), 97-138. On the place of St. Thomas' doctrine in the conciliar decree, cf. pp 134 ff.

[2] The conciliar text (ch. 2) itself refers to q. 1 of the la *Pars* of the *Summa theologiae*. What seems to be most important is the general perspective: basic ideas and distinctions which dominate the composition of *Dei Filius* arising from the problematic of faith-reason, creation-revelation which revive and emphasize, in the framework of the anti-rationalist polemics of the 19th century, Thomistic motifs as the "scholastic renewal" systematized them. Cf G. Paradis, "Foi et Raison au Premier Concile du Vatican," in De *doctrina Concilii Vatican Primi* (Rome, 1969) pp. 221-281.

The Second Vatican Council seems notable at first for a sharp break with this theological continuity. Of course the preparatory projects (schemata) distributed to the bishops at the beginning of the Council follow, for the most part, the theological direction which had inspired Vatican I. By their contents, references and style those documents reflect certain characteristics of academic Thomism and pay no attention to problems of contemporary culture and church. The real start of the Council, its decisive position taken in 1962, coincided with the rejection, at least tacit, of those projects prepared at some length (and cost), as well as with the setting aside of the scholastic theology which they contained and whose lack of credibility they thus furthered.[3] To express new orientations now needed by the Church, Vatican II could not find an established theology which was then enjoying public respect and which might be incorporated into the conciliar texts.

The constitutions, declarations, and decrees emanating from the Council are the work of compromise and are considered to be pastoral. The coherence of a technical language or a systematic homogeneity are not central in them. The key ideas of revelation, Church, priesthood, mission, union of Christians, presence of the Spirit in the Church and in

[3] The projects emanating from the Conciliar Commission *"De doctrina fidei et morum"* (with Cardinal Ottaviani presiding) were all distinguished by concern for a precise if not rigid formulation of traditional doctrine. Thanks to the publication of the *Acta syndolalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani* II (Typis polyglotis Vaticanis, 1967), we can compare the scholastic purport of the primitive *schemata* with the definitive wording adopted by the Council. The judgment expressed in the following pages is the result of that confrontation in the Constitutions *Lumen gentiun, Dei Verbum* and *Gaudium et Spes.*

history, the very idea of liberty are employed in an empirical, descriptive way. Most often they develop theological intuitions coming out of several currents of renewal. Thomas Aquinas is present throughout without being named inasmuch as his doctrine remains the point of reference if not the first source of inspiration for great theologians such as Chenu, Congar, Schillebeeckx or Rahner. The study of the interventions of the conciliar Fathers permits us to evaluate the strength of a theology whose fidelity to Aquinas is on a par with its opening to contemporary social and individual problematics. We can mention here the example of Cardinal Karol Wojtyla's insistence on the pivotal ideas of liberty, creation and salvation, their relationship to each other, and the importance of the redemption to clarify both Christian existence and the sense of history. Today, as head of the Church, John Paul II resumes, prolongs and extends to the entire world the broad orientations which he helped to integrate chiefly in the constitution *Gaudium et Spes* and the declaration *Dignitas Humanae Personae*.[4] To be sure, the Council rejected a Thomism fixed in abstract formulas and so went beyond fossilized theological systems. On the other hand, it showed impressively an intense and creative fidelity to the doctrine and spirit of Aquinas. There is nothing surprising in that. Vatican II was the outcome of a vast process of ecclesial growth where the presence of theology became more inventive as it associated a predilection for Aquinas with bold innovations. When the

[4] Cf. C.J. Pinto de Oliveira, "Gospel and Rights of Man. The Theological Originality of John Paul II," in *John Paul II and the Rights of Man* (Fribourg, Switzerland, 1980). It analyzes the point of view of the present Pope (then Archbishop of Cracow) during the Council through texts published in the collection cited in the preceding note and in other texts still unedited.

modernist crisis was at its height producing troubling relations between Church, Scripture and Tradition, J.M. Lagrange drew from Aquinas a realistic, clear and operational understanding of history and human freedom under divine action; he succeeded in legitimizing the use of the historical method and of critical procedures in the service of a tradition of true exegesis. The way was thus opened to the contemporary biblical renewal which the encyclical *Divino Afflante* of Pius XII in 1943 canonized at the proper moment and which the dogmatic constitution *Dei Verbum* would take up again more extensively in 1965. Was it not in an inventive and dynamic fidelity to Aquinas that L.J. Lebret found the sources of human economics and the inspiration for an integral development of persons and peoples which the constitution *Guadium et Spes* and the encyclical *Populorum Progressio* proclaim to be the most urgent requirement for the future if not for the very survival of humanity?

Vatican II showed the same attitude of openness and selective discernment toward Thomas that it adopted vis-à-vis other different forms of living tradition in the Church. Such discernment prompted it to abandon all special systems, systems sometimes so crystallized that tradition and system took on a polemical and defensive bias. Vatican II thereby linked the Church of the present day and its future to biblical, patristic, liturgical and theological sources. By forgoing the earlier, well-worn paths of the Counter-Reformation, it expressed confidence in the spontaneous spirit of original principles and charisms discoverable in the great doctors.

The synthesis of Aquinas, courageously and lucidly stripped of all academic rigidity, profits by being read

and expanded in the light of post-conciliar renewal and in the perspectives opened by today's Church.

2. *The Doctrine of Aquinas and the Primordial Directions of the Council*

We must consider what is fundamental, essential and productive in Aquinas by citing four options which form the main stages of the renewal barely begun by the Council. They point out places and conditions for a fruitful encounter of conciliar orientations and promises with the theology of Aquinas.

a) Perhaps the fullest and most understandable theological position at work in the Council is the harmonious integration of creation in the work of redemption. Its counterpart lies in the understanding of history as the fabric of salvation arranged and subordinated to an eschatological fulfillment. From this it follows that the whole cosmic and historical universe is conceived as a process of liberation and as an achievement of the Paschal Mystery which the gift of the Spirit turns into a reality in the Church and in the world.

Such a vision of salvation integrating, unifying and energizing the cosmos and history and becoming a source of grace and responsibility is present everywhere in Vatican II, especially in the most innovative texts of the Council. Different chapters of the first part of the constitution *Gaudium et Spes* develop these themes.

b) Closely connected with these motifs and explaining their principle, the constitution *Guadium et Spes* sets forth, in particular the mission of the Spirit, a universal mission

yet one which is varied in its results. "The Spirit operates in history"[5] to bring to success and to God the work of salvation; to inspire, strengthen and rectify the aspirations, demands, and movements of human progress. Insistence on the unity and identity of the Holy Spirit and on the diversity noticeable in the results of its action explains the unifying and pluralist vision which the Council proposes within history – one seen as tending toward its definitive, eschatological fulfillment – and explains why Vatican II fully acknowledges the stability of the temporal, physical, economic and cultural orders. The Spirit acts in a certain way in the People of God; it guarantees the specific mission and the indefectibility of the Church as source of truth and salvation. But from the very fact that the Church is of the Spirit, it is called to pay homage to values and truths appearing in a partial or less important way in the life-and, aspirations of people, appearing in religions and even in a secularized world where the same Spirit is present as principle of all truth and of all good. As the source of discernment, the presence of the Spirit is thus the first principle of the life of the Church and of Christian existence.

c) In a doctrinally logical although semantically new definition the Church is presented as the "sacrament of salvation and of the reconciliation of the whole of humanity." This statement recognizes the expansion of sacramental conception beyond the realm of ritual. Above all, this understanding of Church as the fundamental sacrament charac-

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[5] Cf. the author's "'L'Esprit agit dans l'histoire.' La totalisation hégélienne de l'histoire confrontée avec les perspectives du Concile Vatican II," *Hegel* et la *théologie contemporaine* (Neuchâtel, 1977), pp. 54-73.

terizes the community of salvation as one sent, as mission, as place and as a quest of unity. The Church is already the eschatological gift of unity and peace; it is unity begun, badly in need of the perfect union of believers, of all religious people, indeed of all men and women hurt by atheism, idolatry and paganism.

d) Finally, let us point out a fourth point. Faith defined in the constitution *Dei Verbum* (no. 5), whose ideas underlie the fundamental positions of the Council, is characterized first as the conversion of the whole person to God, to the Living God, revealing himself through Christ in history and existing now through the grace of the Spirit. Faith is thus shown as a personal encounter which the Church raises up or encourages; it collaborates with the intellectual adherence which men and women give freely to the grace of the Spirit.

The union of grace with intelligence and liberty can only lead to an insistence on the fact that the action of the Spirit engenders research in and adherence to the truth as much as the awakening and the process of liberty. A dimension of interiority indicates the openness in Vatican II with all its originality. People can search for and find truth only in complete liberty. The Spirit of holiness and love makes the Church a source of truth and a guardian of liberty. A pneumatological and anthropological interiority complements the objective, historical and communal aspects which the Council accentuated with a view to founding a stronger missiological and ecumenical opening of the Church as well as to grounding its comprehensive and dynamic positions with regard to politics, economics and culture.

After this brief reminder of basic points, let us emphasize the mutual benefit which-was to result from the encounter of the conciliar message with a renewed understanding of the theology of Thomas Aquinas. The conciliar message could not or would not express itself in a homogeneous and precisely delineated theology. Theology seeks new and sometimes divergent paths, making encounters and even dialogues difficult. Could not reference to Aquinas favor the search for exactness and even for identity within Catholic theology?

But precisely for Aquinas' theology, the conciliar renewal and the post-conciliar challenges offer unprecedented opportunities for a new vitality and fecundity. First, Aquinas' theology will return to its basic principles precisely as it encounters the points which the Council raised in the universe of creation and salvation. Conciliar insistence on the role of the Spirit in the life of the Church, in Christian existence and in the history of peoples, cultures, religions; and on the Spirit as source of truth and liberty (with truth emphasized as much as liberty in the preparation and progress of faith) – all these conciliar contributions are extremely welcome and beneficial to the work of theological renewal. They help to rectify and restore balance to some Thomistic systems whose elaboration in historical and cultural forms hardened into partial formulas, even into polemics. Furthermore, Aquinas' synthesis is marked by certain constraints coming from its *ordo disciplinae,* that is to say, from the method and model which scholastic theology used. As to the content, the same medieval context led Aquinas to treat certain basic questions of faith rather unsatisfactorily. If his teaching did not close the doors to the development of a theology

of the Inquisition, nevertheless it left open the way to a theology of religious liberty, of ecumenism, and of a universal mission.[6] On the other hand, by encountering and absorbing Vatican II's message, the basic principles of the *Summa Theologiae* were thrown into new relief. The mission of the Spirit, the "new law," liberty at the heart of faith, as well as ideas about our anticipation of eschatology, the virtues of faith and hope and the primacy of charity as "form of the virtues"[7] were aspects which previously Thomism had not been able to employ. They became productive, however, in that springtime which the Council initiated in the Church and the world.

3. Thomas Aquinas: Vatican II's Commendation

The general directions of the Council, on its attitude at once comprehensive and selective with regard to different forms of Tradition, pointed out the global limits and the context of life and of doctrine which could clarify the use it made of Thomas. The recommendation of Aquinas was

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[6] See, for example, questions 10 & 11 of the II-II on the "unfaithful." In ,_ 11, a.3 the doctrine of tolerance is formulated in the objections with "authorities" borrowed from Scripture and from Greek thought. The article's teaching also draws inspiration from the anti-Donatist writings of St. Augustine.

[7] Pertinent here are the basic tents of the *Summa theologiae*. On the doctrine of the "mission of the Spirit," see I, q. 43; it is a pivotal question situated between a contemplation of the Trinity in itself and a look at the plan and the works of creation and salvation; it should be brought into contact with the treatise on the New Law – the evangelical Law which is the Law of liberty and of the Spirit (I-II qq. 106-108); on liberty at the heart of faith (II-II, q. 4 and De *Veritate,* 14, 2) and on charity as the *"forma virtutum"*, see II-II, q. 23, 8. These nuggets of Aquinas' doctrine fashion an original theology faithful to the Gospel and to tradition, and able today to orient the life of a Christian and of the Church.

the result of debate and mature reflection set amid a series of discussions and arguments over a decree on the formation of priests. That schema distributed to the conciliar fathers in May, 1963 was the revised version of a document elaborated by the preparatory commission; it revived the prescriptions of the old Code of Canon Law (in 1366, 2) stipulating that the *"Philosophia perennis* should be taught to future priests *"secundum Sancti Thomae rationem, doctrinam et principia."* Formation in theology should develop *"S. Thoma magistro, sicut de philosphia dictum est.*[8] Those texts often received glowing praise[9] but more and more interventions asked for a flexible statement, for one more attentive to the need to engage in dialogue with different cultures and to recognize the important contributions of modern and contemporary philosophies. Requests coming from representatives of Oriental churches were especially insistent. Balancing the different opinions,[10] the Council was able to reach unanimity on the following points:

a) Philosophical formation, mentioned first, does not refer explicitly to St. Thomas: "The philosophical disciplines will be taught – says the decree *Optatam Totius* – in a way which will lead seminarians from the very beginning to a solid and coherent knowledge of the human person,

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[8] Cf. *Acta Synodalia...,* vol. III, Period. III, Para VII, pp. 523-524.

[9] An Australian bishop declared: *"Summe laudatur. Retineatur omnino,"* apropos of the determenations concerning Aquinas. Cf. *Acta Synodalia,* p. 969.

[10] As a recommendation of Thomas Aquinas which takes account of cultural diversities, the needs of ecumenical dialog and of Oriental churches, see the interventions of Msgr. Hoffner *(Ibid.,* p. 860), of the Conferences of Indian bishops *(Ibid.,* pp. 895-896), of the bishops of Indonesia *(Ibid.,* p. 970), of Canada *(Ibid.,* p. 951), of the Patriarch of the Melkites *(Ibid.,* p. 900), or in the name of the Maronites (Ibid., p. 938).

the world and God. To succeed in this, they will rely on "the philosophical patrimony which is forever valid" (*"innixi patrimonio philosophico perenniter valido"; #15*). A note refers to the encyclical *Humani Generis,* citing the exact pages of the AAS (vol. 42 [1950], pp. 571-575) where Pius XII detailed the content of this "philosophical patrimony forever valid" and justified the attachment of the Church to the "Angelic Doctor" by virtue of the "eminent superiority of his method," and of "the harmony of his doctrine with divine revelation"; "it is supremely efficacious for assuring the fundamentals of the faith and for gathering usefully and without danger the fruits of a healthy progress." The Council continued: "Attention must also be paid to more recent fields of philosophical research, especially to what exercises a significant influence in a particular country, and also to recent scientific progress. Here the decree touches on ideas from the encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* where Paul VI in August, 1964, insisted upon the necessity and the format of dialogue.

b) Conciliar orientations on the teaching of dogmatic theology refer explicitly to Aquinas. After having assigned to biblical, patristic and historical sources a primordial place, the same conciliar decree adds: "Next to illumine the mysteries of salvation, seminarians should learn to penetrate them more deeply and to perceive their logic through reflection, with St. Thomas as master" (# 16). A note here refers to the discourses of Pius XII and Paul VI which emphasize how Thomas' doctrine "guides and stimulates research." Addresses by Paul VI in 1964 and 1965 had helped to clear the way for these conciliar decisions by declaring that fidelity to St. Thomas "far from resulting

in a system unproductively turned in on itself, is capable of successfully applying its principles, methods and spirit to new tasks which the problematic of our day proposes for the consideration of Christian thinkers."[11] The Declaration *Gravissimum Educationis* on Christian education, citing that same speech of Paul VI, proposes to Catholic faculties and universities a program of courage and freedom in research: "New problems and areas of research created by progress in the modern world will be carefully studied. It will be possible to grasp more clearly how faith and reason unite to attain to truth." The conciliar declaration continues: "Doing that, one need only follow the way opened by the Doctors of the Church and especially by St. Thomas" (no. 10). To connect Aquinas' doctrine with all of tradition as a rallying point and not as a rupture and to extol his method and his spirit as an incitement to research and to dialogue in the Church and with different forms of culture – this is the essence of the directives in agreement with the practice and orientation of the Council.

B. Contributions and Questions Coming from Contemporary Theology

Encouraged by the climate of liberty and research created or stimulated by Vatican II, Catholic theology strove to profit by the great conciliar orientations. But it also

[11] Allocution of Paul VI at the Sixth International Thomist Convention, Sept. 10, 1965. *Optatam totius* refers to that conference (note 36 of the conciliar decree) without giving any reference. It is also cited by the Declaration *Gravissimum educationis* (No. 10, note 31 which refers to the text of the *Osservatore Romano,* Sept. 13-14, 1965). We cite the text given by *Documentation Catholique* No. 1957 (Oct. 17, 1965), col. 1747-1750.

revived and emphasized other tendencies, viewing in a more or less critical fashion an ensemble of cultural, social and even political influences.

Let us next point out characteristic features of active, prominent, current theologies and the assumptions, methods and fields of research or thought which they explore. Along with its critique of Thomistic systems, such a survey can only contribute to a renewed and creative understanding of the theology of Aquinas.

1. Positive or Critical Assumptions

Contemporary theology has set its goals clearly; its ambition is daringly universal. It seems to bypass seminaries and ecclesiastical institutions and even to dispense with models and systems of the past. To face problems created by culture, indeed to consider them a starting point for all research, to utilize scientific discoveries, to speak the language and employ the method accepted by the scholarly world if not by the experts – these are a few characteristics of a theology which would be present and active in today's society. In a perspective which is, as a whole, ecumenical, communication goes beyond the limits of systems, especially of scholastic systems. Conversely, a philosophy of the subject, a critical philosophy, a philosophy of history, a philosophy of science or a hermeneutical method universally applicable to scripture, to tradition and to statements by the *magisterium* of the Church attract theologians' attention as do different ways of expressing experience or of analyzing existence in our personal life and in society. These are the starting points (either stated or implicit) of the dynamic currents in Christian theology in the West.

2. *A Triple Challenge: The Theologies of Existence, History and Liberation*

Let us illustrate what is at stake here by looking briefly at three representative theologies:

a) *Theologies of existence* come from the union of three factors whose persistence guarantees their greatness or, at least, their widespread influence:

⇨ Faith, defined as the decision which involves a person of authentic existence before the light and by virtue of the Gospel message.

⇨ This message is grasped and interpreted by a hermeneutic who analyzes the meaning of life existentially, taking into consideration the mythical representations of the New Testament at their symbolic value, and relativizing ecclesiastical formulas considered in their doctrinal, "notional" content.

⇨ Such a vision of salvation, revelation and faith is dependent on a philosophy of the person which leaves little space for objective knowledge of God and salvation. For the person is capable of only two types of knowledge: by the first, one becomes receptive to the liberating understanding of existence, of subjects, of himself and of others; by the second, one is endowed with an "objectifying" knowledge which can grasp, measure and manipulate objects, a knowledge which would be servile and subjugating if applied to subjects (humans) and would become idolatrous if it aspired to encircle God, to reduce God to the condition of an object, to dispose of him like a thing.

No one should underestimate the importance of existential theologies, whose pioneer, R. Bultmann, remains the

enduring point of reference. They emerge where Christians try to speak of divine transcendence. Their strength comes from the fact that they gather culture and Christian thought into a coherent doctrine. Thus the idea of a "faith-decision" confers a cultural vitality on the doctrine of fiducial faith, so basic for Reformed piety and theology. On the other hand, the prolongation of Kantianism here refuses to theoretical reasoning any capacity to know God. Existential theologies were formulated in the light of the first elaborations of Heidegger who influenced contemporary thought extensively by his efforts to reinterpret the history of Western thought and to examine closely the ways of being and the depths of language.

b) *The theologies of history* from their beginning have clearly shown their rupture with traditional doctrinal elaborations. They hold the Hellenization of Christianity to be a fact already achieved before the patristic era and strengthened during the Middle Ages. Theology must begin anew by refusing the framework and forms of Greek thought, especially its cyclic conception of history. The history of salvation, understood as a series of biblical events centered in the Christological event and aspiring to eschatological fulfillment, is the means and object of revelation. The entire field of theology will be none other than the hermeneutics, itself historical, of the history of salvation. Some dispute the postulates of an exclusivism which make biblical history the only instrumentality of revelation with the result that dogmatic enterprise pursued by the Church especially through the Councils is held in low esteem. Understood fully and intelligently, the history of salvation makes up the tissue of divine revelation, as

the constitution *Dei Verbum* points out (cf. Ch. I), and this fact still underlies Christian theology. But theological articulation is exactly what remains to be done; we search to actualize the history of salvation in the heart of existence, a history reaching out to the history of humankind and to the resources and challenges of cultures.

Similar theological expressions are used today by theologians who emphasize the reality of the history of salvation and to find in it a new inspiration for the Christian life. The theme of the history of salvation touches that of eschatology present and efficacious in the promise which generates hope. This theological current (e.g., J. Moltmann) stresses the fundamental, biblical fact that the divine revealing word is "promise." Revelation is not to be perceived as an "epiphany", a disclosing of God's being, but speaks of God only as coming, inviting the action of God and enabling the action of man. It creates new possibilities of action and generates an anticipating waiting; it becomes creative in time and in liberty. Through hope, it makes present things to come even as it urges Christian action forward. Thus the promise creates something quite new in history, a *"novum"* real and qualitative, producing unprecedented events and possibilities. Through God's promise and our hope, history is in the process of becoming. Strictly speaking, a theology which is truly submissive to the divine word must be defined as: *"Spes quaerens intellectum,"* correcting the traditional claims of connecting theological comprehension only to knowledge of the faith *("Fides quaerens intellectum.")*.

In the theology of hope, following upon the theologies of history (W. Pannenberg), the refusal to admit a

God revealed and recognized in his being persists and strengthens those possibilities of knowledge arising from an *intellectus fidei* is denied or made incidental. Only knowledge which is consubstantial with dynamic hope, creative of action and a source of history, will serve as a primal and inventive principle for theology and for the life of the Christian and of the Church.

c) *Liberation Theologies.* If we remain with the epistemological aspect of the structure and legitimacy of theological knowledge, we see an underlying affinity between the theologies of hope and the theologies of liberation. The first call for a reversal of perspectives: the eschatology which school manuals had almost relegated to an appendix on the "last ends" must now again become the source and first principle of all theology. Such a reversal is at the origin of theologies of liberation.

For them, the divine Word is essentially, primordially liberating. Certainly witnessed through scripture and the tradition of the Church, the living Word – source, truth and salvation – exists in the very act of liberation, in the process or praxis which constitutes the people of the New Covenant: theologies of liberation are fashioned by liberty, justice, knowledge, or better, by the recognition of God as liberator. It is not enough to say that the message of salvation is human improvement, that a liberation in the temporal or political order would be a corollary quite close to a conversion of the heart. More radical than so-called political theologies (developed in Germany after the war) the theologies of liberation refuse at first the spiritual-temporal and personal-social dichotomies arising out of the "privatization" of the understanding of salvation, a

privatization which gives preference to personal salvation, to the pardon of personal sins and to the sanctification of souls. The really innovative starting point here is this: whatever the accuracy of abstract distinctions, the complete liberation of the human person and the knowledge of God must be grasped firmly as an indivisible totality. God's manifestation, the revelation of God in history, takes place in that time and in that place where the oppressed are being liberated and where they are liberating the oppressors.

When we describe praxis as that activity of global, social and personal, spiritual, cultural and political liberation, we could say of theology: *"Praxis quaerens intellectum"*; praxis is the reflection of the Church on living and committed faith.

C. Aquinas and Contemporary Theology

The projects of current theology, of which we have just given a few examples, may seem quite removed from Aquinas. More perhaps by silence or omission, his doctrine is now often the object of reservations or of' a predominant attitude of suspicion. Such a climate of suspicion can be explained by a whole range of criticisms accumulated through the centuries which Catholic theology today seems inclined to take seriously. These criticisms could be drawn together in the censure found in Heideggerian language and shared by some Christian thinkers: the authentic synthesis of Thomas Aquinas may be a model of onto-theology, of a theology in bondage to metaphysics, of a theology which might have misunderstood the originality and the transcendence of the God revealed by Jesus Christ.

If it missed its essential aim and objective, why would it be surprising that Thomistic theology would be shown incapable of grasping and legitimizing the most important data of the Christian message and the most urgent demands of today's thought? To stay with the preceding examples, is not Thomism the opposite of the theologies of existence, of history and of liberation?

1. Thomas Aquinas and the Crisis of the Foundations

This question should be discussed because it leads us into the deepest and most radical of contemporary interrogations. We touch here the crisis which is affecting the very foundations of theology. The stakes of such a universal and basic examination are as exciting as they are dangerous. It is, since the Middle Ages, as *quaestiones disputatae* that we are used to meeting questions on the existence of God, on divine mysteries in theological *summae,* but today they soon become something of a methodical doubt; there can be a questioning of the fundamentals of the faith born of the insecure position of many believers, an insecurity in danger of intensifying. Indeed, with a seriousness and a reality emphasized by the impact it has on the faith of the Christian people and on public opinion in general, theology ponders the originality of the Christian fact, asking about God revealed in Jesus Christ, about the person of Jesus, about salvation, the Gospel and about the universality of the Church's mission, the necessity of dialogue, indeed about the collective understanding of human problems, about the very survival of humanity. Theology must preserve the transcendence of the evangelical message and at the same time increase the stability of the political, economic, cultural order and make apparent the autonomy of scientific know-

ledge and research. Equally strong is the imperative to ground the liberating and originating action of human rights and of peace in the world in the primordial exigency of the Christian ethic.

If we look closely at these theologies and face the criticisms which different trends occasion, we notice an apparently insurmountable ensemble of paradoxes. To show the lordship of God – through Christ, in the Spirit – acting universally on the world, history and existence seems to be the common purpose of a theology intending to be faithful to the Gospel message, but the attachment of the world to God is denounced as a cosmo-theology, implying God's dependence with respect to a universe whose demiurge or ultimate legitimation he would become. Analogously as ethico-theology and historico-theology the steps which bind God to the moral order or history, or which would, seek therein ways to draw near to God are stigmatized as ethically or historically simplistic, and yet a consensus seems to be established in the majority of contemporary theological projects about the rejection of any metaphysical way of having access to God or of articulating the data of revelation.

If we use the Heideggerian notion of onto-theology, we seem to have to qualify and critique any way which would go from Being to God, which would result in the identification of God with the Supreme Being. This is a theism destructive of God. Such a theism would only be the elder sibling if not the parent of atheism, since it would bring God down to the level of beings of which God would be only the first in a series or in an order supposedly univocal. Thomas Aquinas has recently received a dual reproof: of being a theologian with a cosmo-theology,

and being one with an onto-theology. "Even the greatest representatives such as Thomas Aquinas escape with difficulty the Heideggerian critique of metaphysics," declared C. Geffre. The French Dominican looks for a "non-metaphysical theology" whose task will consist in "going beyond theological objectivism and theological subjectivism.[12]

2. A True Fundamental Theology

We must now turn to the synthesis of Thomas Aquinas – in its originality. What are its theological foundations? We shall thus come upon positive contributions for the questions of contemporary theology.

a) *Aquinas' Originality.* The essential originality of Thomas Aquinas, which has lasted undiminished even up to now, springs from the breadth and depth of his preliminary design. For him, *sacra doctrina* is **theology:** knowledge of God himself and in himself, knowledge whose "subject" is God revealed, that is to say the object primordially known and becoming the shining light for the whole range of mysteries and realities which flow from him. Aquinas' starting point is not philosophical. He has in view primarily theological knowledge.

Such theological knowledge becomes possible by virtue of the transcending expansion which the intellect, while staying in its proper domain of rational capacity, receives from faith, or better yet from the theological triad of faith-hope-charity. This raising of the intellect – the constitutive moment of theological understanding – is intimately connected with the relationship of an orientation

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[12] Cf., "Théologie" in *Encyclopedia Universalis,* 15 (Paris, 1973), p. 1090.

and subordination of creation to salvation, of history to eschatological fulfillment, of human existence to holiness in the Spirit, of the ethical order to theological life. Here we can emphasize, in spite of the diversity of thought-forms, the fundamental agreement of the major orientations of Vatican II with the fundamental principles of the teaching of St. Thomas.

Theology must have recourse to the mediation of creation, interpreted in the ontological register, in the light of Being as well as in the mediation of history, of the network of conditions of existence, in view of integrating and legitimizing a Christian plan of personal, social, political ethics. But all these mediations – ontological, historical, existential, ethical, political – flow back to the God of revelation received in faith; their stability, their capacity to be known and illuminated flow from this source by participation. From the same source they receive their coherence within a theological system and arrange themselves there according to degrees which can be essentially differentiated and united only in an analogical way.

Contemporary issues lead us to consider more closely and to bring out more explicitly aspects of theological understanding to which earlier Thomists paid little attention and which Aquinas himself never felt it necessary to emphasize. In a single movement, theological understanding, supported by faith, recognizes the transcendence of the revealed God who is its proper object, and recognizes the consistency of reason and of the metaphysical work which it can accomplish, of history and of the ethical order. These [are] aspects of the vocation of humanity at the heart of the divine plan of the creator and savior.

Theology develops as a sort of appetite for knowledge – one might say, in paraphrasing and condensing Thomas Aquinas,[13] as a form of knowledge, of knowledge of God, having God for the object which transcends, attracts and elevates the one who knows. Theology has roots in faith insofar as it is intellectual, insofar as it ushers in theological life by knowledge and by the eschatological tension of hope and the transforming force of charity come to widen and deepen.

Let us compare some of Aquinas' positions with contributions and interrogations of contemporary theology.

b) *Theological Knowledge and Existential Decision.* Existential theologies have insisted rightly on the importance and fertility of decision in the origin and development of faith, and on the orientation which it gives to Christian existence; consequently decision has a major role in theological understanding. Avoiding any concordism and respecting differences of the problematic and the noetic horizon, we still find in the doctrine and language proper to St. Thomas many similar factors, namely: an exaltation of the will, a primacy of spiritual affectivity recognized and accentuated as being the very root of the act of faith. At the beginning of faith there is a love of truth, absolute love of the only truth. The desire to know the true God is awakened and revived by the divine message resounding in the human person who is looking for the fulfillment of his or her destiny. One can never insist enough on the union of faith and hope in the heart of faith, on the synergy of desire and intellect as first principles of knowledge,

[13] See especially: *S. Th.* II-II, q. 2, a. 10; In *Boetii* de *Trinitate*, q. II.

on the teleological and eschatological perspectives which the theology of Thomas Aquinas develops. But the originality of this theology appears precisely in the fact that faith, affectively and voluntarily implanted, achieves a sort of step toward freedom even as it remains essentially and primordially an activity of knowledge. It demands of people that they pass beyond their limits, even as it takes first form in the innermost part of the intellect itself. This is called paying homage to the *Veritas Prima,* the sovereign Truth, creative and saving, but recognizing at the same time both the infinite character of divine Truth and the finite character of the created intellect. *"Perceptio Veritatis tendens in ipsam":* theology should tend toward Truth without seeking to monopolize it. It refuses to enclose divine transcendence in notional limits and in the equalizing form of the judgments which every step in human knowledge must nevertheless take. Theology learns from faith itself that human knowledge is asked and summoned to go beyond itself, to act in the "non-objectivizing" realm. Its desire for objectivity must submit to the demands of its subject – the divine mystery – which the intellect could affirm only by denying limitations to its conceptual representations and to the inevitable deconstruction of its rational procedure. Such is the properly theological origin of the analogy, which Thomas Aquinas developed systematically by borrowing certain philosophical elements from the gnoseology and logic of Aristotle. The *analogia entis* does not take the place of the *analogia fidei* with which it conforms to a certain degree, and which it must serve by spreading out and adapting itself to theological imperatives. Following Thomas Aquinas, we can only, agree with Karl Barth's just irritation and his stigmatizing of an *analogia*

entis which would make God one being among others, even at the head of all other beings. Likewise we can only welcome Bultmannian and post-Bultmannian intentions which refuse to enclose God and the work of salvation within the limits of an "objectivizing" knowledge. For Aquinas, however, the theological project remains a work of the intellect, of an intellect enriched by a transcendence made valid by divine creation and which the revealing Word and faith will actualize and complete.

c) *St. Thomas and Onto-theology.* Stripped of their technical presentation and uprooted from a carefully shaped system of thought, Heidegger's critiques and insights have tended to become, if not the common stance, at least an obligatory point of reference for a good number of contemporary theologians. Through a genealogical reconstruction, influenced by Nietzsche and by his original hermeneutics, Heidegger proposed to uncover, indeed to expose, the most profound orientations which inspired Western thought. The metaphysics of Greek philosophy with Plato as its source, from the beginning and in an inexorable way, has missed the question of Being by missing its difference with individual beings. Metaphysics searched for a basis for these contingent beings, to ground and to explain them: the existence of an uncaused cause. This ends in postulating the existence of a Supreme Being who is conceived as an infinite being and who will then crown, or better, found and legitimize the universe of beings, the total order of finite beings. Heidegger did not exceed the limits of his own territory, the history and hermeneutics of philosophical thought, but a possible application quickly commanded the attention of theologians. For them, the misfortune of Christian theology consisted precisely in its sanction of (Greek) meta-

physics; this caused its greatest error: it misunderstood the specificity of the Christian message and substituted for the revealed God the Supreme Being of onto-theology.

We must be grateful to critics who denounce such theological deviations as dangerous temptations precisely because they are subtle ones. Such warnings can be salutary if they incite us to a more attentive reading and to a deeper hermeneutical understanding of tradition, especially of the major positions of Thomas Aquinas.

To repeat, Aquinas, in the service of theological elaboration, employed a complete ontology as well as an anthropology, a cosmology and an ethics borrowed in substance and form from Greco-Roman thinkers. He did this deliberately. Replying to his critics he declared with a touch of irony that by using philosophical doctrines in the service of theological understanding, far from diluting the wine of divine wisdom, the Christian teacher was changing water into wine.[14]

Indeed, in the construction of his synthesis, the *Summa,* in which the elements of *sacra doctrina* are organized in all their splendor and spread out from a strictly epistemological viewpoint, appear the specific characteristics of a theology tending toward the transcendence of divine mysteries. He never tired of probing Scripture according to the methods and resources at his disposal with a view to inquiring into the meaning and coherence of the revealing Word and work of God. But in anything touching the systematic work of theology, Aquinas mobilized all the

[14] In *Boetii* de *Trinitate,* q. 2, art. 2, ad 5.

resources of reason and culture so as to obtain for the believer and for the Church the intellectual penetration, rationally articulated, of the mystery of God, God seen in his trinitarian life and in the generosity of his creative and saving love. Aquinas' intention to reveal as much as possible the mystery of God himself through the *"perfectum opus rationis"* would demand great inspiration and genius in theological synthesis. We can see that the *ordo disciplinae,* the rigor of the method adopted by Thomas Aquinas, would lead him to approach the unity of God before the Trinity of Persons, to proceed from the human person, from the analysis of its capabilities and limitations to the understanding of human relations with God; and then to the study of Christology, of soteriology and of eschatology. At the beginning of the *Summa theologiae* we meet the theme of the ability of the human person to reach God; Aquinas stressed the value and the means of a rational approach to God, as well as the possibilities, limits, and conditions of a theological language. Of God, Thomas Aquinas did give a quasi-definition: the One-Who-Is, *Esse Subsistens,* associating the experience of reason to the audacious version that the Greek bible gave to the liberating theophany: *Ego Eimi Ho On, Ego Sum Qui Sum.* (Ex. 3, 14; cf. S. Th. I, q. 13, a. 11; I, q. 3) Thus, he approached the study of the divine Trinity only after the unity of God is identified as the Subsistent Being, First and Perfect, whose existence would be rationally established. To begin with a perfect being is the stumbling block for contemporary thinkers who observe there the characteristic procedure of an onto-theology.

A similar reproach would seem to be merited by any system which might deduce the mystery of the Trinity

from a metaphysically constructed theism and reduce Christian theology to a natural, rationally based theology. The doctrine of Thomas Aquinas, however, is quite different. Certainly it aims to show that a natural and rational knowledge of God is possible, that it is accessible to any human intellect. This knowledge does not lead to the dangerously subtle fabrication of an intellectual idol, but to a knowledge which is true but imperfect, insufficient in itself for salvation. The human person cannot close in this partial knowledge when the Divine Word is announced; opening up to the transcendence and the magnanimity of revelation will subordinate to it every possible form of knowledge of God. Knowledge obtained by faith, of which theology aims to be the rationally articulated elaboration, will integrate, in intellectual and existential coherence, the rational knowledge of a God whose validity and boundaries it values.

Thus enlightened by faith, theological understanding without mediation grasps the mystery of the Unity and Trinity of God. Contemporary theologians glimpse[15] other approaches to a systematic reflection which would start initially from the Trinitarian life. Searching for a theological penetration of this same mystery, Aquinas felt it necessary to begin with everything that reason and faith can know about God viewed in the transcendence of his Being and in his divine activity whose end is creation. He then looks at the life of thought, of will and of love, as it is reflected in the human person, the image of God, who by means of participation and analogy, reverts to a certain knowledge

[15] See for example W. Pannenberg, "Subjectivite de Dieu et doctrine trinitaire," in *Hegel* et la *théologie contemporaine,* pp. 171-189.

of the One who is the Principle of human being and the End of human destiny. Theology distinguishes, analyzes, [and] arranges the potential and different modalities of knowledge with a view to a total and coherent approach to the divine mystery. It respects God's transcendence at the same time as it tries to respect the human being in its dignity and weakness. To be sure, some contemporary theologians may prefer other ways but they must confront the teaching of Aquinas correctly understood.

d) *Connections with the Theologies of History and Hope.* We would like to mention some ways in which a renewed knowledge of the synthesis of Thomas Aquinas relates to some of the dynamic currents of contemporary theology.

The primacy of the theological dimension which Aquinas points out in Christian existence and in *sacra doctrina* permits him to speak to the theologies of history, hope and ethical action, especially political commitment.

Thomas Aquinas deliberately introduced into the thread of his systematic theology the events in the history of salvation which set off the event of Christ. On the other hand, like most people of the Middle Ages, he prolonged the eschatological perspectives received from the patristic heritage. His theology did not develop an autonomous vision of history in which human action would intervene through various projects. A line of positive factors, especially the orientations of the last Council, draw us to look beyond the limits and mentality of one epoch and to find in their richness the principles of the doctrine of Aquinas in those areas.

One such principle views in depth the links of the prophetic revelation with faith and history. We mention here two major orientations:[16]

First of all, in accordance with Aquinas' theological primacy mentioned above, history becomes a mediator of divine revelation but through the light of the prophetic Word and of the faith which it stimulates. God alone remains the essential and primordial object of faith. His light diffuses through all the biblical and ecclesial mediations which he wished to employ. To God, source of salvation, refer all the events of history which he has chosen as means of revelation and salvation. Recognizing that those events, through divine efficacy, become objects of faith and source of salvation, Aquinas proclaimed clearly and boldly; when I confess my faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, this profession means first in theological strictness that I believe in God who reveals himself and saves me in and by the death and resurrection of his Son.

Second, by the primacy of the revealed God, which surpasses the order of being just as the tissue of history transcends it, history is recognized and valorized in all its consistency, as the temporal development of humanity. Such an understanding involves the reality and contingency of the facts of history and the responsibility of human agents who lead it or take part in its action: kings, leaders, peoples, groups, individuals. For whatever touches the meaning of religious or profane history, the significance

[16] Cf. De *Veritate* q. 14, a. 8, ad 13 and ad 14; q. 13 (on prophecy).

which events can assume for the Christian era, Aquinas remains extremely sparing of words.[17] Nevertheless, in a deeply theological perspective, we receive valuable indications of the eschatological character of faith itself, aspects which touch decisively the understanding of existence and history. Agreeing with patristic and medieval tradition, Aquinas defines the virtue of faith (he refers to Hebrews 11) as the founding principle of all teaching. *"Est autem fides sperandarum substantia rerum, argumentum non apprentium." "Substantia rerum sperandarum,"* faith is the assured anticipation of promised goods; it inaugurates in us the intentional presence of the future; it become for us a principle tending toward the contemplation of the Truth already known initially and imperfectly. Not to confuse it with hope – which Aquinas characterizes as the strengthening and dynamism of desire turning toward the divine, promised good, faith as knowledge is stimulated by hope and remains inclined toward eschatological fulfillment. Already the desire to believe is stirred up by the Word which resounds as a promise to people in search of happiness and the fulfillment of human destiny. This vital joining of desire and knowledge, this synergy of faith and hope forming the first spark of Christian life is developed by Thomas Aquinas only in a personal perspective, in the framework of – a theology of the virtues.[18] It remains, however, open to perspectives of an eschatological realization of all the People of God, an idea evoked by the last Council, (cf.

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[17] Cf. Max Seckler, *Das Heil* in *der Geschichte* (Munich,1964), pp. 179ff.

[18] Cf. *Sum. theol.*, II-II, q.4; De *Ver.* q. 12, a. 2 (where the same theme as that of the *Summa* is developed).

Lumen gentium, ch. 7) and by the historical vision which it suggests (cf. *Gaudium et Spes,* no. 26, 4 and *passim):* the Spirit acts in history to carry through God's plan, to emphasize our responsibilities and to guide our action.

A faithful and up-to-date rereading of Thomas Aquinas uncovers the same essential data which modern theologies of hope proclaim and set up in different ways. Rather than *"spes quaerens intellectum,"* we would say with Aquinas, *"Fides sperans quaerit intellectum."* The Word-promise always opens new fields of understanding and action in existence and in history. But with Aquinas we would be inclined to notice first that the new horizons (opened by promise and by the historical projects which it illuminates and raises up) presuppose, beyond history, the revelation of the Lord of history, transcending and dominating all past, present and future events. The revelation of God is the first goal of the prophetic and evangelical Word. It could not be identified with the static and timeless "epiphanies" of certain pagan religions.[19] Only the knowledge of God confers the true meaning, the authentic dynamism to life, action and Christian hope.

e) *New Aspects of Liberation Theology.* At the dawn of modern times, when America was discovered, a lucid and creative re-reading of Thomas Aquinas gave rise to a theological renewal open to the missionary and to cultural and political problems which marked this decisive historical turning point for the Church and civilization. I refer particularly to the Spanish theologians of the School

[19] Cf. J. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (New York, 1967).

of Salamanca, especially to their inspiration, Francisco Vitoria, and to the Dominican missionaries who spiritually engendered Las Casas, their spokesman and their prophetic personification. One reading of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas tried to justify as "natural" the institution of slavery and justified the enslaving colonialist methods. But those pioneers of the human rights drew inspiration from the Gospel and Aquinas to declare the equality of men and women and of peoples not only "before God" but in a juridical-political perspective. All people, "barbarian" Indians included, bear the indestructible image of God. Their original liberty is inalienable. They must be "liberated," so that they might be served.[20]

This lays the basis-for international law and recalls an evangelization founded on grace and liberty, on grace enabling liberty of' freedom. This is at the heart of Thomas Aquinas' Christian anthropology.

How should we understand such a certain in theology, a conflict between two-ways of reading tradition? Some ended up by ratifying the status quo hostile to human beings

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[20] The fundamental text here is the De *Indis* of Francisco de Vitoria, the entire *Relectio* I. On the perduring divine image, the inanlienable right of "dominium," and on the disposition and possession of land and of temporal goods see no. 5. Cf. also the *Obras completas* of F. de Vitoria (Madrid, 1960), p. 652. Las Casas in his *Testament* takes seriously his own vocation of being the defender of the inalienable liberty of the Indians and of his pledge to "liberate" them. Enrique Dussel concludes from this that Las Casas was, in fact and to the end, a precursor of "liberation theology." *Disintegracion de la cristianidad colonial y liberacion* (Salamanca, 1978), p. 116; cf. Zilvio Zavala, *La defense des droits de l'homme en Amérique latine* (16th to 18th centuries) (UNESCO, 1964).

(I refer to the "theology" of a G. Sepulveda, for example). Whereas others, like Vitoria and Las Casas, discovered in Aquinas' theology indications for new departures on the Church and even for humanity. Through history, we approach the essential question which liberation theologies raise by appealing to the example and inspiration of Las Casas.

Three attitudes, closely, connected, constitute the triple source of inspiration for the theologians who were bent on truth as well as on justice and liberty. We offer them, as criteria for a lucid hermeneutics and a renewed and creative understanding of the theology of Thomas Aquinas.

First, beyond specific conclusions probably influenced and narrowed down by previous eras, we must again find the primordial inspiration, the first principles which established the system and which order its equilibrium and major articulations. Thus, a Sepulveda may have been right for the material detail of some assertions about the "natural character" of slavery which Aristotle had defended in a given cultural context and which Thomas Aquinas did not sufficiently criticize. On the other hand, reverting to the basic principles of justice, the natural law, and the fundamental equality of men and women which form the basis for the moral theology of Aquinas, his disciples in the sixteenth century happily brought to light new orientations in the meaning of liberty, equality and the necessary solidarity among all peoples, especially between the Indians, who were still pagan and the civilized and Christian Europeans.

Second, such a living and innovative theology became possible (and this is the second condition) because it was

rooted in the life of the Church. By themselves (this is the case with Las Casas) or by 'virtue' of a fraternal association with those who were directly involved (Vitoria and the other masters of Salamanca), theologians participated effectively in the praxis of the local communities. They benefited from their experiences, they responded to, their needs, and in that way they were in contact with the real-problems of the Church and humanity. They knew the other side of those problems, the side of the colonizing world, the interests and motives which actually determined the achievement of colonization and the effort of Christianization. Such an association with the Church, both local and universal, became the main stimulant and rectifier for the thought of the theologians of that time as it must be for theologians of all times.

Finally, evangelical resourcefulness permitted the theologians to criticize and go beyond narrow mentalities and interests, even if the latter could claim support from some ecclesiastical institutions. They appealed directly to universal brotherhood, to the Spirit of ,Christ, to the apostolic mission with which the Gospel had entrusted to the Church. So they could criticize concessions which were too general or ambiguous, concessions granted by the bulls of Alexander VI (and earlier by his predecessors) which fostered the domineering ambitions of the colonizers.

Amid new conditions in cultural and political realms with their planetary dimensions, liberation theologians have awakened this same conscience and Christian reflection. What they propose is the universalization of the achievement of Vitoria and Las Casas but in situations created by the possibilities and challenges of the technological world.

Closely linked with concrete praxis, liberation theologies are connected with history and places, with peoples and regions: considering people in their real conditions of liberty or dependence, they tend to become regional. They see our history and world torn by contradictions as oppressors impose upon the oppressed. The height of oppression appears in the fact that the oppressed are willing to be collaborators in the oppression. Liberation theologies denounce many a perverse theology developed in "centers" (northern hemisphere") and then exported, with its own oppression, toward the "peripheries" (the oppressed "third world"). Enrique Dussel points out that such a theology might quell the scandal of oppressions, might put to sleep the oppressed even as it salves the conscience of the oppressors. But there is danger too that, in the attempt to liberate theological denunciation will be used, arousing resentment and fratricidal conflict.

Here a deeper penetration into the theology of Aquinas will have the opportunity to strengthen the results of a radical criticism and an absolute authenticity which now vitalize Latin-American theology. More perhaps than other theological currents, liberation theology could receive from Aquinas two valuable contributions:

1) A bringing to light of the absolute and universal character of right – we would say today of basic rights – which theology discovers as it considers the human being. Human nature and person are referred to the Absolute God, the knowledge of whom is inseparable from recognizing justice. Here we have articulated theologically and ethically the prophetic and evangelical message which links the "knowledge of God" to the respect and promotion of

rights, especially for the poor, the dispossessed, the socially uprooted.[21]

2) Second, the integration and legitimization in moral theology of the primordial demand to set up a social order, structured by institutions and laws are always applied and adapted to the effective realization of the law. In fact, the theological synthesis of Aquinas has given the widest possible range to the study of justice, right, laws as a primordial ethical requirement. Yet it eschews the privatization which characterizes some modern ethics. Such a valorization of justice on the personal and social plane can merge with the new demands and projects on a global scale for the full liberation of humanity aiming at healthy social structures and institutions. Today this requires considerable research including the analysis of varied forms of injustice and oppression and the systematic use of "technique in the service of love" (Lebret).

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As a theological achievement disclosing both wide perspectives and urgent needs, the synthesis of Thomas Aquinas faces today the problems and aspirations of the post-conciliar Church. His theology can recognize and carry new enrichments sparked from a confrontation with modern theologies of history, existence and liberation.

This theology is more real today than yesterday. It will probably be even more so tomorrow.

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[21] On the development of these ideas (with a bibliography) cf. C.J. Pinto de J Oliveira, "D'une anthropologie théologique a une morale politique," in N.A. Luyten, ed., *L'Anthropologie de Saint Thomas* (Fribourg, 1974).

God Transcends All: A Message from Saint Thomas for Our Times*

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"O Lord our God, how majestic is thy name in all the earth! Thy glory is above the heavens... When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast established, what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou cost care for him? Yet thou hast made him little less than God, and cost crown him with glory and honour" (Ps. 8, 1-5). There are no words in Holy Scripture which proclaim with a greater eloquence the beauty of creation or the dignity of man in creation, than these which speak to us of the immensity of the sky and of the image of God in man.

These moving words express the infinite smallness of man faced with the immense splendour of the transcendent

* A homily delivered during Mass for the Feast of St. Thomas, on the 8th March, 1971, in the "Angelicum" by His Eminence Cardinal John Joseph Wright.

God, which extends above the skies and above the created universe. These same words lead us to discover the sign of the divine work in man, that man who has been made a little less than God – a *little* less, yes, but nevertheless *less,* and therefore under this aspect God is always transcendent, since the Creator always transcends *everything* he has created.

I should like to invite you to meditate on these verses of Holy Scripture and together with me to think about the message that St. Thomas – whose feast we are celebrating today – addressed to present day society and so appropriate for our present day thinkers who over look or even deny God's transcendence.

Apart from the importance of the rare virtues of this glorious son of the Dominican Order, which fully justify the infallible judgement of the Church on the sanctity of St. Thomas, his greatness rests on the validity of his doctrine. This does not deny the contributions of other outstanding masters in the history of Christian thought, but it is able, more than any other, to solve the great and difficult problems which afflict the world of culture, and are the cause of crises in contemporary society.

Despite indubitable progress in philosophical and theological thought, and despite all old and new attempts to minimize or to deny its importance, Thomistic doctrine is clearly of providential relevance today.

As Cardinal Parente has wisely pointed out: "We do not interpret the vitality of Thomism by a mechanical repetition of his language and his formulae, nor do we claim to impose his ideological system and all its contents

and structure on the modern conscience, just as nobody would want to keep to Dante's language together with his ideas and tastes. The vitality of these great men has to be maintained, in the same sense that certain of their intuitions and basic attitudes, certain principles and elements of their work, which bring out the unity and the continuity of human thought face to face with reality, have a universal character. This establishes their goals and also guides them towards the ulterior conquest of truth and goodness" (P. Parente, "Vitalita di S. Tommaso", in *Aquinas*, 1958, p. 183).

Practical Atheism

My words are meant to be a homage to St. Thomas, and I am happy to point to the pressing need we have of him in the present historical circumstances in which we are witnessing a profound crisis in values which is involving the whole of human society. It is expressed in the progressive desacralization of the world and in the ever growing: materialism in man.

It is to this society, whose basic structure of family, school and state is being called into question, to this society which rejects the idea of God, country and family as values no longer current in the new social reality, it is to this society that the message of Thomism can and must be addressed, in order to bring men back to the rediscovery of those rational principles which not only take philosophy as the natural guide lines of society, but also make us understand that the world, and therefore especially man, has been created in order that he may participate in the life of God, in the love of God, and that he may recognize the Creator and his work.

It is needless to waste words in order to justify the statement, still often heard that never as in our days has atheism which was formerly limited to certain individuals and cultural currents, become a mass attitude and phenomenon, and seems to be asserting itself more and more as such.

But it is more difficult and complex to examine the genesis of contemporary atheism and the general irreligiousness of modern society, because here we are facing a multitude of confused causes which puzzle us when we try to discover that existential attitude which in one way or another, betrays absence of God in man's conscience.

By admitting as valid the distinction between practical atheism and theoretical atheism, positive and negative atheism, it is nevertheless possible to point out the most significant aspects which characterize the various origins and consequences of this phenomenon.

Practical atheism, that is to say, the atheism of those who live as if God did not exist, and arrange their lives without any consideration of the existence of any principle that transcends the values of the individual or the world, is related to loss of the sacral sense of life. From this largely derive the bewildering progress of technology and the hubbub of industrial revolution which have led to the present "consumer society", in which the mechanical and technical state of mind has overturned the personalist and Christian vision of life. The fact is that, in order to survive, such a society must rely on superfluous acquisitions created by the incessant urging of mass propaganda. It follows that "there are a great number of human beings in whom the awareness of the hierarchy of values has either been

dimmed, or extinguished or turned upside down that is to say in these persons the values of the spirit are neglected or forgotten or denied. At the same time technical and scientific progress and material welfare are encouraged and propagated, often made pre-eminent and are even extolled as the only reason for life", as *Mater et Magistra* says.

Theoretical Atheism

But such growing indifference to the needs of the spirit is the cause of man's progressive materialism and the growing distance between his life and all idea of Cod and of the sacral.

But theoretical atheism is no less widespread and serious. People either ignore God with an attitude of indifference (negative atheism) or deny him outright, doing their utmost to reject the bases of the proofs of his existence, of the necessity of religion and of every transcendental truth. But although the consequences of this form of atheism are the same, its inspiring motives vary.

Theoretical atheism derives in its various forms, from different cultural trends which for one reason or another ignore, deny or falsify the true concept of the relationship between God and the world, between grace and nature, or more generally, between transcendence and immanence.

Contemporary irreligiousness, be it in its contestation of the language of religion or in pantheistic statements, or outright denials of God, takes for its model systems which attach the attributes of God to one single reality. At present Marxism, scientific positivism and the dogmas of

psychoanalysis seem to be the most directly responsible for the progressive drifting away from God.

However, these systems derive from more or less old trends whose principle lies in the affirmation of consciousness as having basic priority in respect to being. Rightly have authoritative Catholic philosophers seen in Descartes' *cogito* the first move of modern thought towards atheism. Besides the Cartesian *cogito* which is linked with gnoseological immanence, the process leading to negation of God includes Spinoza's "infinite substance" which introduced into modern thought the concept of the metaphysical immanence of reason.

Bound up with this Cartesian metaphysical dualism, which decidedly breaks the relationship between spirit and nature, between soul and body, are the two main trends in the principles of contemporary atheism, idealism and materialism.

But even more than with the principles of materialism, modern atheism in its origin and development is related to the principle of immanence, which is already present in the Cartesian philosophy of the *cogito,* and is inspired by idealism. It is by this means that the synthesis of the naturalistic and monistic principle of being and of the new concepts of productivity of consciousness are achieved. As a consequence all theology, or rather idealistic theologism, appears as immanentistic atheism. Although from Kant to Hegel God continues to be conceived as Absolute, the negation of transcendence become more and more marked, and radical atheism is asserted. Anglo-American empiricism, with its principle of experience also defends a form of immanence which resolves into imme-

diate experience, and seeks to establish a relationship between the Absolute and the contingent. Exactly because of this immanence, which belongs to both terms, this relationship brings us to a God who is the Whole of the Real, understood as being finite.

Existentialism is also imbued with immanentism, and despite the apparent opening towards transcendence which marks the ambiguous position of Jaspers and Heidegger on the problem of God, atheism is triumphant in French existentialism (Sartre).

Efforts to reconcile theism with pantheism (Krause, Bergson, Le Roy, Varisco) have no other goal, for they do not safeguard God's transcendence.

What has been said so far suffices to prove that modern atheism is in close relationship with the affirmation and defense of immanence in the strict and exclusive sense. It has rightly been said: "We maintain that the principle of immanence is intrinsically atheistic and coincides with the radical assertion of atheism, in that the assertion of immanence in the order of being is, and cannot but be by virtue of the principle of contradiction, the denial of transcendence in the order of knowledge, which constitutes the first step towards theism in its basic meaning" (C. Fabro, *Introduzione all'ateismo moderno,* Rome, 1964, p. 922),

Natural Knowledge of God

Atheism is therefore basically bound up with the defense of that concept of immanence which inspires much of modern philosophy. Not only this, but it seems to be clearly responsible for the deviations of certain contemporary

theological writings which rest upon a philosophy without transcendence. (Take for example K. Barth's rejection of natural theology, the radical absence of the natural knowledge of God in Bultman and Altizer's "Theology of the death of God").

It is precisely in this sphere of contradictory and destructive ideas that Thomistic doctrine can and must be appealed to, as the one which more than any other is capable of offering adequate principles for definitive solution to so many problems, or rather to the problem of God which contains all problems and in which all find the key to their solution.

But the entire problem of our natural knowledge of God can be solved in the assertion of God's transcendence. To reject divine transcendence would mean to distort all religious thinking; it would mean reducing religion to an illusion, since it would not serve to raise man above the world and himself. On the contrary, it would make man fall back on himself, whereas theology, as far as one could speak of a theology, would be reduced to anthropology. When we admit the existence of an Absolute, it must be conceived as One who surpasses all and cannot be surpassed by anyone it must be recognized as that Being who has no common yardstick with created beings, and this means that God is transcendent.

But it is this very assertion which is rejected, and this refusal constitutes the basic feature of modern atheism; it is the truth that is being contested and rejected as being inconceivable by modern man.

According to some, to state that God is transcendent would imply a conception of God spiritually or metaphysically "out side of the world", "a God up there... up beyond the bright blue sky", "a majestic Old Man who lives in the sky". But such a God would clash with modern cosmological knowledge, and would be an obstacle rather than a help, an "idol to be knocked down", if we wish to give our Christianity any meaning.

We leave aside the fact that in the Old and the New Testament pictures of God "up there", "up in heaven" frequently occur, and that such expressions are direct symbols of the transcendence of God. Think for example of Psalm 8, 2: "O Lord our Lord, how majestic is thy name in all the earth! Thy glory is above the heavens", or think of the words of Jesus: "When you pray say: 'Our Father who art in heaven'". Apart from these expressions which, as we said, in view of their source are justifiable, we must ask whether an expression of a God "up there, in the skies", should be rejected as inadequate or even harmful in the same way as the statement that God is transcendent.

Concept of Transcendence

Our reply is immediate: absolutely not! The trouble is that "...certain believers have interpreted references to space too literally... For them 'divine height' meant a distance that could be more or less exactly measured, but in any case an oversimplified way of seeing the outside only of a distant God. Hence the embarrassment of ingenious believers on seeing that the blue sky has lost its inviolability, when the first Soviet astronaut exclaimed triumphantly: 'The heavens are empty, I have not met God where he was

thought to be!' Believers, puzzled by Gagarin's professed atheism were undoubtedly accustomed to think of God as some great Object, up there, above the clouds in the sky" (I. Pirlot, "Come parlare di Dio alla luce della recente filosofia", in *Credere in Dio oggi?*, Perugia, 1969, p. 106).

Speaking as one of the simple faithful I must confess that I have never, not even as a child, thought of God in terms of North or South, up or down or, so to speak, in geographical, astronomical or spatial terms. Nor do I think that I ever knew others who thought about God in this way, although perhaps, in poetry, in popular preaching or in colloquial speech without any scientific or theological pretensions, we have spoken in this manner by way of analogy.

Those who show great perplexity in accepting traditional religious statements, or worse still, reject divine transcendence in favour of immanence, prove that their concept of transcendence is not sufficiently clear, or is altogether wanting.

In affirming the existence of a supreme Being, because of inadequate human knowledge, one uses metaphors and pictures, such as, "up above", "up in the skies", in order to express the concept of the absoluteness and the transcendence of God. The true believer knows that neither spatial distance, nor exteriority are intended, for he perceives that between this Being and the world there exists a strict relationship that binds and unites the world to God.

The difficulty in accepting the statement that God is transcendent lies in not having understood the concept

of transcendence, or rather the relation transcendence-immanence which is the way for clarifying the relationship between God and man. Here St. Thomas is a master, and it is here that I find his message to the thinkers of our times.

On the basis of the principle of being, or of that "which possesses the act of existing", which is the first principle and cannot be included in any other, and is such that all other conceivable principles are necessarily included in it, St. Thomas conceives a sane metaphysical realism, and in it the problem of God the only true and ultimate problem, contains all the elements for the solution of the problem of the world and of man. This means that for St. Thomas, the world and man, by their very nature point back to an Absolute which alone is able to solve every problem. This is how the relation which binds the world with God is described, and how it is asserted that God is present in man, and lives and operates in him, neither in a disjunction that separates and sets them apart, nor in a conjunction which identifies the terms.

Reason Leads to God

According to St. Thomas, reason leads us to understand that God is present in all things by his power, by his presence and by his essence. By his power inasmuch as all things are subject to his power; by his presence inasmuch as all things are open and naked to his eye; and finally by his essence inasmuch as he is present to all things as the cause of their being. But the statement that God as author of nature is present in created being should not lead to an identification with created beings. There exists a relation between God and his creatures which safeguards the dis-

tinction of the terms and avoids all pantheistic confusion, but also avoids the danger of transcendence understood as distance, which by setting the transcendent against what is transcended would upset the relation itself.

The discussion about the relation between God and creatures develops into a study of divine creative action, and its clarifying element is the principle of transcendence a concept which St. Thomas presents brilliantly.

Transcendence is based on creation, understood as an actual communication of being of which God is the source. To create means to communicate one's own being to creatures; creative action does not put a distance between the creature and its Creator, but brings it into a deep intimacy with the Creator who, by giving creatures being, binds them to himself and fills them with himself. "The Being of God", says St. Thomas, includes by its own virtue all that exists, under whatever form and in whatever manner, because everything exists only through sharing in his being" (I *Peri Hermeneias,* lect. XIV). But because of the fact that he infinitely surpasses them, he transcends them. And God transcends every single being not because he is opposed to them according to some antagonistic dialectic, but inasmuch as he contains in himself all their inner riches in an infinitely superior manner. The acceptance of divine transcendence does not in fact mean to place a distance between God and the world, but to recognize his supreme closeness. As a matter of fact, the basis of transcendence is not opposition, but the immanence of the transcended in the transcendent. Without immanence God would be a stranger to the world and would neither be infinite nor perfect. In the same way

without transcendence God would be identical with the world and would appear imperfect, potential and in a process of becoming.

To say that God is transcendent is equivalent to saying that God is so immanent, that the world is so full of Cod that he overflows it. But this immanence is a continual communication of being, a continual communication of love. Again St. Thomas says: *"Id unde omnia Deo uniuntur, scilicet eius bonitas quam omnia imitantur, est maximum et intimum Deo: cum ipse sit sue bonitas... Est igitur in Deo amor non solum verus sed etiam perfectissimus et potentissimus" (Contra Gentes,* 1, c. 91, n. 758).

The Divine Presence

In this light of God's transcendence-immanence in the world, cosmic reality and above all man, the masterpiece of creation, acquire a marvellous significance and value. The dignity of the human being is exalted and not depreciated by virtue of that very divine presence which gives value to liberty.

From this brief and fragmentary outline we can conclude that a careful examination of the concept of transcendence is not only no obstacle, or danger to Christianity, but would serve to resolve the crisis between God and created reality between God and man, between body and spirit, between grace and nature.

To the people of today, those of the so-called "consumer society", who seem irremediably headed for a materialism which deprives them of every interest in the supreme values of life, a materialism which depersonalizes

them and brings them unrest and anxiety, which ends if not in hatred, certainly in that contestation which is the drama of our society, to these men we wish to present anew the philosophy of St. Thomas as the doctrine capable of solving radically all the most disquieting problems which disturb consciences and threaten the culture, the progress and the peace of modern society.

Provided Courtesy of:
Eternal Word Television Network
5817 Old Leeds Road
Irondale, AL 35210

St. Thomas and Transubstantiation

L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO

There are words that express what needs to be said with such precision that we cannot do without them once we have discovered them. At the Council of Nicea the heretics' subtleties were cut short by the insertion in the Symbol of the statement that the Word is **consubstantial** with the Father. Equivocations about Jesus Christ's real presence in the Eucharist were eliminated at the Council of Trent by canonization of the **transubstantiation** to designate the wonderful and singular conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the body of Christ and the whole substance of the wine into his blood. Use of this word was not new. It was in current use a century before Saint Thomas, because it was perfectly adapted to the traditional doctrine that was being defended.

Transubstantiation means the change of one substance into another substance. Some have feared that it might not be able to be understood by a modern mind. This does little honour to the modern mind. The idea of substance is one

of the primordial notions possessed by every man and of which he constantly makes use. I cannot say that I feel cold without perceiving myself as a permanent subject, a substance, affected by this unpleasant condition.

And when it is a question of the substance of bread and wine, we only have to know what all knows, when they distinguish bread and wine from other things. I might add that I have found Professor Marcuse using this very term transubstantiation in its true sense, and I think that this should be sufficient guarantee of its modernity (The One Dimensional Mail, 1968).

St. Thomas shows us in a wonderful way how the key of the mystery of the Eucharist is in transubstantiation. The term does not dispel the mystery, because the divine operation is too sublime and too secret in this sacrament for us to be able to understand it, but it suffices to prevent non-believers from declaring that the Church's doctrine is impossible (Contra Gentes, 63).

The fact is that this doctrine does raise many difficulties for human reason. For example: Christ ascended into heaven; his return to earth is something reserved for the end of time. How can his body be also in the Eucharist, and not only on one occasion, but at the same time on so many altars and in innumerable tabernacles? Not only that, but also in an invisible fashion, while the bread and the wine appear to remain unchanged?

As Newman said, a thousand difficulties do not make a doubt. It is beautiful to see how St. Thomas sets out the objections with all their force, and humbly, firmly and fervently attaches himself to Christ's words. "The fact that

the body and the blood of Christ are in this sacrament", he tells us, "cannot be perceived with the senses or with the understanding; it can be perceived only by faith, which is founded on divine authority". Then, with St. Cyril and with the Church, he repeats the text from St. Luke: "This is my body, which will be given for you", and comments, "Do not doubt that this is true, but receive the Saviour's word with faith, for he is the truth; he does not lie" (S. Th. q 75, a. 1).

Let us see how he poses the question: How did the body of Christ, which was not in the host, begin to be there; how did the blood of Christ, which was not in the chalice, begin to be there?

He answers: for a body to be where it formerly was not, there is need either for that body to come from somewhere else, or for it to be the term of a change occurring on the spot. A fire does not exist in a house where it is not brought in from the outside or where it is not produced inside. He resolutely goes on: Christ's body did not come from outside the Eucharist, as if it were carried there from another place. In fact he remains where he was and does not leave heaven; moreover, he could not betake himself into many places at the same time. Therefore it is the other possibility that occurs. This body of Christ becomes present there subsequent to a change. What change? The change of the substance that was there before, the substance of the bread. When Christ said, "This is my body", it was if he had said, This, which is still bread, I change into my body. One substance has been changed into another substance. The bread has been changed into Christ's body. It is a real transubstantiation: "The body of Christ cannot

begin to be in this sacrament unless the change of the substance of the bread be effected".

No other example exists of such a radical change. The whole reality of the substance of the bread has been transformed and has become this body of Christ, which already existed but which was not yet the term of this change.

No created power could cause such a profound change of the whole being of a substance. But the divine power, the cause of all being, has this power over the whole of being.

Therefore, after this event, there is no longer bread, because it has been entirely transformed. My senses continue to perceive what they perceived before, because what has been changed is only the bread's substance, not the sense appearances which signified it, namely extension, colour etc. But the reality which these appearances or accidents hide from us, is the body of Christ, into which the bread has been changed. That marvel that is effected on one altar is effected on all the altars on earth, as the sun moves in its course.

It is not the body of Christ that is multiplied, for that is unique and always the same, and the constant term of all the transubstantiations. What is multiplied is Christ's presence, corresponding with the number of species consecrated.

After the consecration Christ is where the bread was; but he is not there in the way that the bread was. The latter was there not only in its own substance, but also in its extension, its form, its colour; which qualities remain

after the consecration, as the appearances of the bread which is no longer there. Christ's body is wherever the substance of the bread was, because it was into his body that the substance of the bread was changed. In virtue of the transubstantiation and in accordance with the words uttered, it is only the substance of Christ's body which is present; Christ's body is in fact there not according to the requirements of its own dimensions, but in another manner, which is the manner in which substance is present. But this substance of the body of Christ is the substance of a living body and of the body of God; it follows, therefore, by concomitance, as we say, that Christ's body, having been made present by the consecration of the host, is present with the blood, the soul and the divinity of Christ. Similarly, Christ's blood, having been rendered present by the consecration over the chalice, is present with the body, the soul and the divinity of Christ.

On the one hand, therefore, Jesus Christ is in the Eucharist as he is in heaven, with his glorious body, his blessed soul, and his divinity; on the other hand, he is not there in the same way that he is in heaven; he does not occupy space there according to the extension of his body, but his presence is limited to the dimension of the eucharistic species, since it is the bread that was there that has been transubstantiated, and he is whole and entire in every part of the species, since the substance of the bread was wholly and entirely in every part of that bread.

The great invisible miracle that has transformed the bread into the body of Christ, and that has transformed the wine into his blood, gives a solid and coherent explanation of the real presence.

Saint Thomas undoubtedly also made use of principles from his philosophy for his exposition. But the basis is provided and imposed by Scripture.

The Eucharist is above all a remembrance of the Passion and a sacrifice. But the real presence of the victim is necessary, and it is that, as it is presented to us, which makes easy the understanding of the sacrifice.

By virtue of the double consecration, Jesus Christ presents this mystical separation of his body and his blood to his Father as the sacrament of his bloody Passion. Thus Saint Thomas' Eucharistic treatises marvelously illustrate the Church's teaching, which, as we are reminded by the encyclical **Mysterium Fidei,** says that "through the Eucharistic mystery the sacrifice of the Cross, accomplished once on the Cross, is represented in a wonderful way, and is recalled to our memories, and that its saving power is applied for the remission of sins which we commit every day" (AAS 57, 1965, 759).

Taken from:
L'Osservatore Romano
Weekly Edition in English
3 April 1969, page 7

Encyclical Letter: Spe Salvi

POPE BENEDICT XVI

Introduction

1. *"SPE SALVI facti sumus"* – in hope we were saved, says Saint Paul to the Romans, and likewise to us (*Rom* 8:24). According to the Christian faith, "redemption" – salvation – is not simply a given. Redemption is offered to us in the sense that we have been given hope, trustworthy hope, by virtue of which we can face our present: the present, even if it is arduous, can be lived and accepted if it leads towards a goal, if we can be sure of this goal, and if this goal is great enough to justify the effort of the journey. Now the question immediately arises: what sort of hope could ever justify the statement that, on the basis of that hope and simply because it exists, we are redeemed? And what sort of certainty is involved here?

Faith is Hope

2. Before turning our attention to these timely questions, we must listen a little more closely to the Bible's testimony

on hope. "Hope", in fact, is a key word in Biblical faith – so much so that in several passages the words "faith" and "hope" seem interchangeable. Thus the *Letter to the Hebrews* closely links the "fullness of faith" (10:22) to "the confession of our hope without wavering" (10:23). Likewise, when the *First Letter of Peter* exhorts Christians to be always ready to give an answer concerning the *logos* – the meaning and the reason – of their hope (cf. 3:15), "hope" is equivalent to "faith". We see how decisively the self-understanding of the early Christians was shaped by their having received the gift of a trustworthy hope, when we compare the Christian life with life prior to faith, or with the situation of the followers of other religions. Paul reminds the Ephesians that before their encounter with Christ they were "without hope and without God in the world" (*Eph* 2:12). Of course he knew they had had gods, he knew they had had a religion, but their gods had proved questionable, and no hope emerged from their contradictory myths. Notwithstanding their gods, they were "without God" and consequently found themselves in a dark world, facing a dark future. *In nihil ab nihilo quam cito recidimus* (How quickly we fall back from nothing to nothing)[1]: so says an epitaph of that period. In this phrase we see in no uncertain terms the point Paul was making. In the same vein he says to the Thessalonians: you must not "grieve as others do who have no hope" (*1 Th* 4:13). Here too we see as a distinguishing mark of Christians the fact that they have a future: it is not that they know the details of what awaits them, but they know in general terms that their life will not end in emptiness. Only when

[1] *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* VI, no. 26003.

the future is certain as a positive reality does it become possible to live the present as well. So now we can say: Christianity was not only "good news" – the communication of a hitherto unknown content. In our language we would say: the Christian message was not only "informative" but "performative". That means: the Gospel is not merely a communication of things that can be known – it is one that makes things happen and is life-changing. The dark door of time, of the future, has been thrown open. The one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of a new life.

3. Yet at this point a question arises: in what does this hope consist which, as hope, is "redemption"? The essence of the answer is given in the phrase from the *Letter to the Ephesians* quoted above: the Ephesians, before their encounter with Christ, were without hope because they were "without God in the world". To come to know God – the true God – means to receive hope. We who have always lived with the Christian concept of God, and have grown accustomed to it, have almost ceased to notice that we possess the hope that ensues from a real encounter with this God. The example of a saint of our time can to some degree help us understand what it means to have a real encounter with this God for the first time. I am thinking of the African Josephine Bakhita, canonized by Pope John Paul II. She was born around 1869 – she herself did not know the precise date – in Darfur in Sudan. At the age of nine, she was kidnapped by slave-traders, beaten till she bled, and sold five times in the slave-markets of Sudan. Eventually she found herself working as a slave for the mother and the wife of a general, and there she was flogged every day till she bled; as a result of this she bore 144 scars

throughout her life. Finally, in 1882, she was bought by an Italian merchant for the Italian consul Callisto Legnani, who returned to Italy as the Mahdists advanced. Here, after the terrifying "masters" who had owned her up to that point, Bakhita came to know a totally different kind of "master" – in Venetian dialect, which she was now learning, she used the name *"paron"* for the living God, the God of Jesus Christ. Up to that time she had known only masters who despised and maltreated her, or at best considered her a useful slave. Now, however, she heard that there is a *"paron"* above all masters, the Lord of all lords, and that this Lord is good, goodness in person. She came to know that this Lord even knew her, that he had created her – that he actually loved her. She too was loved, and by none other than the supreme *"Paron"*, before whom all other masters are themselves no more than lowly servants. She was known and loved and she was awaited. What is more, this master had himself accepted the destiny of being flogged and now he was waiting for her "at the Father's right hand". Now she had "hope" – no longer simply the modest hope of finding masters who would be less cruel, but the great hope: "I am definitively loved and whatever happens to me – I am awaited by this Love. And so my life is good." Through the knowledge of this hope she was "redeemed", no longer a slave, but a free child of God. She understood what Paul meant when he reminded the Ephesians that previously they were without hope and without God in the world – without hope *because* without God. Hence, when she was about to be taken back to Sudan, Bakhita refused; she did not wish to be separated again from her *"Paron"*. On 9 January 1890, she was baptized and confirmed and received her first Holy Communion from the

hands of the Patriarch of Venice. On 8 December 1896, in Verona, she took her vows in the Congregation of the Canossian Sisters and from that time onwards, besides her work in the sacristy and in the porter's lodge at the convent, she made several journeys round Italy in order to promote the missions: the liberation that she had received through her encounter with the God of Jesus Christ, she felt she had to extend, it had to be handed on to others, to the greatest possible number of people. The hope born in her which had "redeemed" her she could not keep to herself; this hope had to reach many, to reach everybody.

The concept of faith-based hope in the New Testament and the early Church

4. We have raised the question: can our encounter with the God who in Christ has shown us his face and opened his heart be for us too not just "informative" but "performative" – that is to say, can it change our lives, so that we know we are redeemed through the hope that it expresses? Before attempting to answer the question, let us return once more to the early Church. It is not difficult to realize that the experience of the African slave-girl Bakhita was also the experience of many in the period of nascent Christianity who were beaten and condemned to slavery. Christianity did not bring a message of social revolution like that of the ill-fated Spartacus, whose struggle led to so much bloodshed. Jesus was not Spartacus, he was not engaged in a fight for political liberation like Barabbas or Bar-Kochba. Jesus, who himself died on the Cross, brought something totally different: an encounter with the Lord of all lords, an encounter with the living God and thus an

encounter with a hope stronger than the sufferings of slavery, a hope which therefore transformed life and the world from within. What was new here can be seen with the utmost clarity in Saint Paul's *Letter to Philemon.* This is a very personal letter, which Paul wrote from prison and entrusted to the runaway slave Onesimus for his master, Philemon. Yes, Paul is sending the slave back to the master from whom he had fled, not ordering but asking: "I appeal to you for my child ... whose father I have become in my imprisonment ... I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart ... perhaps this is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back for ever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother ..." (*Philem* 10-16). Those who, as far as their civil status is concerned, stand in relation to one an other as masters and slaves, inasmuch as they are members of the one Church have become brothers and sisters – this is how Christians addressed one another. By virtue of their Baptism they had been reborn, they had been given to drink of the same Spirit and they received the Body of the Lord together, alongside one another. Even if external structures remained unaltered, this changed society from within. When the *Letter to the Hebrews* says that Christians here on earth do not have a permanent homeland, but seek one which lies in the future (cf. *Heb* 11:13-16; *Phil* 3:20), this does not mean for one moment that they live only for the future: present society is recognized by Christians as an exile; they belong to a new society which is the goal of their common pilgrimage and which is anticipated in the course of that pilgrimage.

5. We must add a further point of view. The *First Letter to the Corinthians* (1:18-31) tells us that many of the

early Christians belonged to the lower social strata, and precisely for this reason were open to the experience of new hope, as we saw in the example of Bakhita. Yet from the beginning there were also conversions in the aristocratic and cultured circles, since they too were living "without hope and without God in the world". Myth had lost its credibility; the Roman State religion had become fossilized into simple ceremony which was scrupulously carried out, but by then it was merely "political religion". Philosophical rationalism had confined the gods within the realm of unreality. The Divine was seen in various ways in cosmic forces, but a God to whom one could pray did not exist. Paul illustrates the essential problem of the religion of that time quite accurately when he contrasts life "according to Christ" with life under the dominion of the "elemental spirits of the universe" (*Col* 2:8). In this regard a text by Saint Gregory Nazianzen is enlightening. He says that at the very moment when the Magi, guided by the star, adored Christ the new king, astrology came to an end, because the stars were now moving in the orbit determined by Christ.[2] This scene, in fact, overturns the world-view of that time, which in a different way has become fashionable once again today. It is not the elemental spirits of the universe, the laws of matter, which ultimately govern the world and mankind, but a personal God governs the stars, that is, the universe; it is not the laws of matter and of evolution that have the final say, but reason, will, love – a Person. And if we know this Person and he knows us, then truly the inexorable power of material elements no longer has the last word; we are not slaves of the universe and of its laws, we are free. In

[2] Cf. *Dogmatic Poems,* V, 53-64: *PG* 37, 428-429.

ancient times, honest enquiring minds were aware of this. Heaven is not empty. Life is not a simple product of laws and the randomness of matter, but within everything and at the same time above everything, there is a personal will, there is a Spirit who in Jesus has revealed himself as Love.[3]

6. The sarcophagi of the early Christian era illustrate this concept visually – in the context of death, in the face of which the question concerning life's meaning becomes unavoidable. The figure of Christ is interpreted on ancient sarcophagi principally by two images: the philosopher and the shepherd. Philosophy at that time was not generally seen as a difficult academic discipline, as it is today. Rather, the philosopher was someone who knew how to teach the essential art: the art of being authentically human – the art of living and dying. To be sure, it had long since been realized that many of the people who went around pretending to be philosophers, teachers of life, were just charlatans who made money through their words, while having nothing to say about real life. All the more, then, the true philosopher who really did know how to point out the path of life was highly sought after. Towards the end of the third century, on the sarcophagus of a child in Rome, we find for the first time, in the context of the resurrection of Lazarus, the figure of Christ as the true philosopher, holding the Gospel in one hand and the philosopher's traveling staff in the other. With his staff, he conquers death; the Gospel brings the truth that itinerant philosophers had searched for in vain. In this image, which then became a common feature of sarcophagus art for a long time, we see clearly what both educated and

[3] Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* 1817-1821.

simple people found in Christ: he tells us who man truly is and what a man must do in order to be truly human. He shows us the way, and this way is the truth. He himself is both the way and the truth, and therefore he is also the life which all of us are seeking. He also shows us the way beyond death; only someone able to do this is a true teacher of life. The same thing becomes visible in the image of the shepherd. As in the representation of the philosopher, so too through the figure of the shepherd the early Church could identify with existing models of Roman art. There the shepherd was generally an expression of the dream of a tranquil and simple life, for which the people, amid the confusion of the big cities, felt a certain longing. Now the image was read as part of a new scenario which gave it a deeper content: "The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want ... Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, because you are with me ..." (*Ps* 23 [22]:1, 4). The true shepherd is one who knows even the path that passes through the valley of death; one who walks with me even on the path of final solitude, where no one can accompany me, guiding me through: he himself has walked this path, he has descended into the kingdom of death, he has conquered death, and he has returned to accompany us now and to give us the certainty that, together with him, we can find a way through. The realization that there is One who even in death accompanies me, and with his "rod and his staff comforts me", so that "I fear no evil" (cf. *Ps* 23 [22]:4) – this was the new "hope" that arose over the life of believers.

7. We must return once more to the New Testament. In the eleventh chapter of the *Letter to the Hebrews* (v. 1)

we find a kind of definition of faith which closely links this virtue with hope. Ever since the Reformation there has been a dispute among exegetes over the central word of this phrase, but today a way towards a common interpretation seems to be opening up once more. For the time being I shall leave this central word untranslated. The sentence therefore reads as follows: "Faith is the *hypostasis* of things hoped for; the proof of things not seen". For the Fathers and for the theologians of the Middle Ages, it was clear that the Greek word *hypostasis* was to be rendered in Latin with the term *substantia.* The Latin translation of the text produced at the time of the early Church therefore reads: *Est autem fides sperandarum substantia rerum, argumentum non apparentium* – faith is the "substance" of things hoped for; the proof of things not seen. Saint Thomas Aquinas,[4] using the terminology of the philosophical tradition to which he belonged, explains it as follows: faith is a *habitus,* that is, a stable disposition of the spirit, through which eternal life takes root in us and reason is led to consent to what it does not see. The concept of "substance" is therefore modified in the sense that through faith, in a tentative way, or as we might say "in embryo" – and thus according to the "substance" – there are already present in us the things that are hoped for: the whole, true life. And precisely because the thing itself is already present, this presence of what is to come also creates certainty: this "thing" which must come is not yet visible in the external world (it does not "appear"), but because of the fact that, as an initial and dynamic reality, we carry it within us, a certain perception of it has even now come into existence. To Luther, who

[4] *Summa Theologiae,* II-II^{ae}, q.4, a.1.

was not particularly fond of the *Letter to the Hebrews,* the concept of "substance", in the context of his view of faith, meant nothing. For this reason he understood the term *hypostasis/substance* not in the objective sense (of a reality present within us), but in the subjective sense, as an expression of an interior attitude, and so, naturally, he also had to understand the term *argumentum* as a disposition of the subject. In the twentieth century this interpretation became prevalent – at least in Germany – in Catholic exegesis too, so that the ecumenical translation into German of the New Testament, approved by the Bishops, reads as follows: *Glaube aber ist: Feststehen in dem, was man erhofft, Überzeugtsein von dem, was man nicht sieht* (faith is: standing firm in what one hopes, being convinced of what one does not see). This in itself is not incorrect, but it is not the meaning of the text, because the Greek term used *(elenchos)* does not have the subjective sense of "conviction" but the objective sense of "proof". Rightly, therefore, recent Protestant exegesis has arrived at a different interpretation: "Yet there can be no question but that this classical Protestant understanding is untenable".[5] Faith is not merely a personal reaching out towards things to come that are still totally absent: it gives us something. It gives us even now something of the reality we are waiting for, and this present reality constitutes for us a "proof" of the things that are still unseen. Faith draws the future into the present, so that it is no longer simply a "not yet". The fact that this future exists changes the present; the present is touched by the future reality, and thus the things of the future spill

[5] H. Köster in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* VIII (1972), p. 586.

over into those of the present and those of the present into those of the future.

8. This explanation is further strengthened and related to daily life if we consider verse 34 of the tenth chapter of the *Letter to the Hebrews,* which is linked by vocabulary and content to this definition of hope-filled faith and prepares the way for it. Here the author speaks to believers who have undergone the experience of persecution and he says to them: "you had compassion on the prisoners, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property (*hyparchonton* – Vg. *bonorum*), since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession (*hyparxin* – Vg. *substantiam*) and an abiding one." *Hyparchonta* refers to property, to what in earthly life constitutes the means of support, indeed the basis, the "substance" for life, what we depend upon. This "substance", life's normal source of security, has been taken away from Christians in the course of persecution. They have stood firm, though, because they considered this material substance to be of little account. They could abandon it because they had found a better "basis" for their existence – a basis that abides, that no one can take away. We must not overlook the link between these two types of "substance", between means of support or material basis and the word of faith as the "basis", the "substance" that endures. Faith gives life a new basis, a new foundation on which we can stand, one which relativizes the habitual foundation, the reliability of material income. A new freedom is created with regard to this habitual foundation of life, which only *appears* to be capable of providing support, although this is obviously not to deny its normal meaning. This new

freedom, the awareness of the new "substance" which we have been given, is revealed not only in martyrdom, in which people resist the overbearing power of ideology and its political organs and, by their death, renew the world. Above all, it is seen in the great acts of renunciation, from the monks of ancient times to Saint Francis of Assisi and those of our contemporaries who enter modern religious Institutes and movements and leave everything for love of Christ, so as to bring to men and women the faith and love of Christ, and to help those who are suffering in body and spirit. In their case, the new "substance" has proved to be a genuine "substance"; from the hope of these people who have been touched by Christ, hope has arisen for others who were living in darkness and without hope. In their case, it has been demonstrated that this new life truly possesses and is "substance" that calls forth life for others. For us who contemplate these figures, their way of acting and living is *de facto* a "proof" that the things to come, the promise of Christ, are not only a reality that we await, but a real presence: he is truly the "philosopher" and the "shepherd" who shows us what life is and where it is to be found.

9. In order to understand more deeply this reflection on the two types of substance – *hypostasis* and *hyparchonta* – and on the two approaches to life expressed by these terms, we must continue with a brief consideration of two words pertinent to the discussion which can be found in the tenth chapter of the *Letter to the Hebrews*. I refer to the words *hypomone* (10:36) and *hypostole* (10:39). *Hypomone* is normally translated as "patience" – perseverance, constancy. Knowing how to wait, while patiently enduring trials, is

necessary for the believer to be able to "receive what is promised" (10:36). In the religious context of ancient Judaism, this word was used expressly for the expectation of God which was characteristic of Israel, for their persevering faithfulness to God on the basis of the certainty of the Covenant in a world which contradicts God. Thus the word indicates a lived hope, a life based on the certainty of hope. In the New Testament this expectation of God, this standing with God, takes on a new significance: in Christ, God has revealed himself. He has already communicated to us the "substance" of things to come, and thus the expectation of God acquires a new certainty.

It is the expectation of things to come from the perspective of a present that is already given. It is a looking-forward in Christ's presence, with Christ who is present, to the perfecting of his Body, to his definitive coming. The word *hypostole,* on the other hand, means shrinking back through lack of courage to speak openly and frankly a truth that may be dangerous. Hiding through a spirit of fear leads to "destruction" (*Heb* 10:39). "God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control" – that, by contrast, is the beautiful way in which the *Second Letter to Timothy* (1:7) describes the fundamental attitude of the Christian.

Eternal life – what is it?

10. We have spoken thus far of faith and hope in the New Testament and in early Christianity; yet it has always been clear that we are referring not only to the past: the entire reflection concerns living and dying in general, and therefore it also concerns us here and now. So now we

must ask explicitly: is the Christian faith also for us today a life-changing and life-sustaining hope?

Is it "performative" for us – is it a message which shapes our life in a new way, or is it just "information" which, in the meantime, we have set aside and which now seems to us to have been superseded by more recent information? In the search for an answer, I would like to begin with the classical form of the dialogue with which the rite of Baptism expressed the reception of an infant into the community of believers and the infant's rebirth in Christ. First of all the priest asked what name the parents had chosen for the child, and then he continued with the question: "What do you ask of the Church?" Answer: "Faith". "And what does faith give you?" "Eternal life". According to this dialogue, the parents were seeking access to the faith for their child, communion with believers, because they saw in faith the key to "eternal life". Today as in the past, this is what being baptized, becoming Christians, is all about: it is not just an act of socialization within the community, not simply a welcome into the Church. The parents expect more for the one to be baptized: they expect that faith, which includes the corporeal nature of the Church and her sacraments, will give life to their child – eternal life. Faith is the substance of hope. But then the question arises: do we really want this – to live eternally? Perhaps many people reject the faith today simply because they do not find the prospect of eternal life attractive. What they desire is not eternal life at all, but this present life, for which faith in eternal life seems something of an impediment. To continue living for ever – endlessly – appears more like a curse than a gift. Death, admittedly, one would wish to postpone for as long as

possible. But to live always, without end – this, all things considered, can only be monotonous and ultimately unbearable. This is precisely the point made, for example, by Saint Ambrose, one of the Church Fathers, in the funeral discourse for his deceased brother Satyrus: "Death was not part of nature; it became part of nature. God did not decree death from the beginning; he prescribed it as a remedy. Human life, because of sin ... began to experience the burden of wretchedness in unremitting labour and unbearable sorrow. There had to be a limit to its evils; death had to restore what life had forfeited. Without the assistance of grace, immortality is more of a burden than a blessing".[6] A little earlier, Ambrose had said: "Death is, then, no cause for mourning, for it is the cause of mankind's salvation".[7]

11. Whatever precisely Saint Ambrose may have meant by these words, it is true that to eliminate death or to postpone it more or less indefinitely would place the earth and humanity in an impossible situation, and even for the individual would bring no benefit. Obviously there is a contradiction in our attitude, which points to an inner contradiction in our very existence. On the one hand, we do not want to die; above all, those who love us do not want us to die. Yet on the other hand, neither do we want to continue living indefinitely, nor was the earth created with that in view. So what do we really want? Our paradoxical attitude gives rise to a deeper question: what in fact is "life"? And what does "eternity" really mean? There are moments when it suddenly seems clear to us: yes, this is

[6] *De excessu fratris sui Satyri*, II, 47: *CSEL* 73, 274.

[7] *Ibid.*, II, 46: *CSEL* 73, 273.

what true "life" is – this is what it should be like. Besides, what we call "life" in our everyday language is not real "life" at all. Saint Augustine, in the extended letter on prayer which he addressed to Proba, a wealthy Roman widow and mother of three consuls, once wrote this: ultimately we want only one thing – "the blessed life", the life which is simply life, simply "happiness". In the final analysis, there is nothing else that we ask for in prayer. Our journey has no other goal – it is about this alone. But then Augustine also says: looking more closely, we have no idea what we ultimately desire, what we would really like. We do not know this reality at all; even in those moments when we think we can reach out and touch it, it eludes us. "We do not know what we should pray for as we ought," he says, quoting Saint Paul (*Rom* 8:26). All we know is that it is not this. Yet in not knowing, we know that this reality must exist. "There is therefore in us a certain learned ignorance (*docta ignorantia*), so to speak", he writes. We do not know what we would really like; we do not know this "true life"; and yet we know that there must be something we do not know towards which we feel driven.[8]

12. I think that in this very precise and permanently valid way, Augustine is describing man's essential situation, the situation that gives rise to all his contradictions and hopes. In some way we want life itself, true life, untouched even by death; yet at the same time we do not know the thing towards which we feel driven. We cannot stop reaching out for it, and yet we know that all we can

[8] Cf. Ep. 130 *Ad Probam* 14, 25-15, 28: *CSEL* 44, 68-73.

experience or accomplish is not what we yearn for. This unknown "thing" is the true "hope" which drives us, and at the same time the fact that it is unknown is the cause of all forms of despair and also of all efforts, whether positive or destructive, directed towards worldly authenticity and human authenticity. The term "eternal life" is intended to give a name to this known "unknown". Inevitably it is an inadequate term that creates confusion. "Eternal", in fact, suggests to us the idea of something interminable, and this frightens us; "life" makes us think of the life that we know and love and do not want to lose, even though very often it brings more toil than satisfaction, so that while on the one hand we desire it, on the other hand we do not want it. To imagine ourselves outside the temporality that imprisons us and in some way to sense that eternity is not an unending succession of days in the calendar, but something more like the supreme moment of satisfaction, in which totality embraces us and we embrace totality – this we can only attempt. It would be like plunging into the ocean of infinite love, a moment in which time – the before and after – no longer exists. We can only attempt to grasp the idea that such a moment is life in the full sense, a plunging ever anew into the vastness of being, in which we are simply overwhelmed with joy. This is how Jesus expresses it in Saint John's Gospel: "I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you" (16:22). We must think along these lines if we want to understand the object of Christian hope, to understand what it is that our faith, our being with Christ, leads us to expect.[9]

[9] Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* 1025.

Is Christian hope individualistic?

13. In the course of their history, Christians have tried to express this "knowing without knowing" by means of figures that can be represented, and they have developed images of "Heaven" which remain far removed from what, after all, can only be known negatively, via unknowing. All these attempts at the representation of hope have given to many people, down the centuries, the incentive to live by faith and hence also to abandon their *hyparchonta,* the material substance for their lives. The author of the *Letter to the Hebrews,* in the eleventh chapter, outlined a kind of history of those who live in hope and of their journeying, a history which stretches from the time of Abel into the author's own day. This type of hope has been subjected to an increasingly harsh critique in modern times: it is dismissed as pure individualism, a way of abandoning the world to its misery and taking refuge in a private form of eternal salvation. Henri de Lubac, in the introduction to his seminal book *Catholicisme. Aspects sociaux du dogme,* assembled some characteristic articulations of this viewpoint, one of which is worth quoting: "Should I have found joy? No... only *my* joy, and that is something wildly different... The joy of Jesus can be personal. It can belong to a single man and he is saved. He is at peace... now and always, but he is alone. The isolation of this joy does not trouble him. On the contrary: he is the chosen one! In his blessedness he passes through the battlefields with a rose in his hand".[10]

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[10] Jean Giono, *Les vraies richesses*, Paris 1936, Preface, quoted in Henri de Lubac, *Catholicisme. Aspects sociaux du dogme,* Paris 1983, p. VII.

14. Against this, drawing upon the vast range of patristic theology, de Lubac was able to demonstrate that salvation has always been considered a "social" reality. Indeed, the *Letter to the Hebrews* speaks of a "city" (cf. 11: 10, 16; 12:22; 13:14) and therefore of communal salvation. Consistently with this view, sin is understood by the Fathers as the destruction of the unity of the human race, as fragmentation and division. Babel, the place where languages were confused, the place of separation, is seen to be an expression of what sin fundamentally is. Hence "redemption" appears as the reestablishment of unity, in which we come together once more in a union that begins to take shape in the world community of believers. We need not concern ourselves here with all the texts in which the social character of hope appears. Let us concentrate on the *Letter to Proba* in which Augustine tries to illustrate to some degree this "known unknown" that we seek. His point of departure is simply the expression "blessed life". Then he quotes *Psalm* 144 [143]:15: "Blessed is the people whose God is the Lord." And he continues: "In order to be numbered among this people and attain to ... everlasting life with God, 'the end of the commandment is charity that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith' (*1 Tim* 1:5)".[11] This real life, towards which we try to reach out again and again, is linked to a lived union with a "people", and for each individual it can only be attained within this "we". It presupposes that we escape from the prison of. our "I", because only in the openness of this universal subject does our gaze open out to the source of joy, to love itself – to God.

[11] Ep. 130 *Ad Probam* 13, 24: *CSEL* 44, 67.

15. While this community-oriented vision of the "blessed life" is certainly directed beyond the present world, as such it also has to do with the building up of this world – in very different ways, according to the historical context and the possibilities offered or excluded thereby. At the time of Augustine, the incursions of new peoples were threatening the cohesion of the world, where hitherto there had been a certain guarantee of law and of living in a juridically ordered society; at that time, then, it was a matter of strengthening the basic foundations of this peaceful societal existence, in order to survive in a changed world. Let us now consider a more or less randomly chosen episode from the Middle Ages, that serves in many respects to illustrate what we have been saying. It was commonly thought that monasteries were places of flight from the world *(contemptus mundi)* and of withdrawal from responsibility for the world, in search of private salvation. Bernard of Clairvaux, who inspired a multitude of young people to enter the monasteries of his reformed Order, had quite a different perspective on this. In his view, monks perform a task for the whole Church and hence also for the world. He uses many images to illustrate the responsibility that monks have towards the entire body of the Church, and indeed towards humanity; he applies to them the words of pseudo-Rufinus: "The human race lives thanks to a few; were it not for them, the world would perish...".[12] Contemplatives – *contemplantes* – must become agricultural labourers – *laborantes* – he says. The nobility of work, which Christianity inherited from Judaism, had

[12] *Sententiae* III, 118: *CCL* 6/2, 215.

already been expressed in the monastic rules of Augustine and Benedict. Bernard takes up this idea again. The young noblemen who flocked to his monasteries had to engage in manual labour. In fact Bernard explicitly states that not even the monastery can restore Paradise, but he maintains that, as a place of practical and spiritual "tilling the soil", it must prepare the new Paradise. A wild plot of forest land is rendered fertile – and in the process, the trees of pride are felled, whatever weeds may be growing inside souls are pulled up, and the ground is thereby prepared so that bread for body and soul can flourish.[13] Are we not perhaps seeing once again, in the light of current history, that no positive world order can prosper where souls are overgrown?

The transformation of Christian faith-hope in the modern age

16. How could the idea have developed that Jesus's message is narrowly individualistic and aimed only at each person singly? How did we arrive at this interpretation of the "salvation of the soul" as a flight from responsibility for the whole, and how did we come to conceive the Christian project as a selfish search for salvation which rejects the idea of serving others? In order to find an answer to this we must take a look at the foundations of the modern age. These appear with particular clarity in the thought of Francis Bacon. That a new era emerged – through the discovery of America and the new technical achievements that had made this development possible – is undeniable. But what is the basis of this new era? It is the new correlation

[13] Cf. *Ibid.*, III, 71: *CCL* 6/2, 107-108.

of experiment and method that enables man to arrive at an interpretation of nature in conformity with its laws and thus finally to achieve "the triumph of art over nature" *(victoria cursus artis super naturam).*[14] The novelty – according to Bacon's vision – lies in a new correlation between science and praxis. This is also given a theological application: the new correlation between science and praxis would mean that the dominion over creation – given to man by God and lost through original sin – would be re-established.[15]

17. Anyone who reads and reflects on these statements attentively will recognize that a disturbing step has been taken: up to that time, the recovery of what man had lost through the expulsion from Paradise was expected from faith in Jesus Christ: herein lay "redemption". Now, this "redemption", the restoration of the lost "Paradise" is no longer expected from faith, but from the newly discovered link between science and praxis. It is not that faith is simply denied; rather it is displaced onto another level – that of purely private and other-worldly affairs – and at the same time it becomes somehow irrelevant for the world. This programmatic vision has determined the trajectory of modern times and it also shapes the present-day crisis of faith which is essentially a crisis of Christian hope. Thus hope too, in Bacon, acquires a new form. Now it is called: *faith in progress.* For Bacon, it is clear that the recent spate of discoveries and inventions is just the beginning; through the interplay of science and praxis,

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[14] *Novum Organum* I, 117.

[15] Cf. *Ibid.,* I, 129.

totally new discoveries will follow, a totally new world will emerge, the kingdom of man.[16] He even put forward a vision of foreseeable inventions – including the aeroplane and the submarine. As the ideology of progress developed further, joy at visible advances in human potential remained a continuing confirmation of *faith in progress* as such.

18. At the same time, two categories become increasingly central to the idea of progress: reason and freedom. Progress is primarily associated with the growing dominion of reason, and this reason is obviously considered to be a force of good and a force for good. Progress is the overcoming of all forms of dependency – it is progress towards perfect freedom. Likewise freedom is seen purely as a promise, in which man becomes more and more fully himself. In both concepts – freedom and reason – there is a political aspect. The kingdom of reason, in fact, is expected as the new condition of the human race once it has attained total freedom. The political conditions of such a kingdom of reason and freedom, however, appear at first sight somewhat ill defined. Reason and freedom seem to guarantee by themselves, by virtue of their intrinsic goodness, a new and perfect human community. The two key concepts of "reason" and "freedom", however, were tacitly interpreted as being in conflict with the shackles of faith and of the Church as well as those of the political structures of the period. Both concepts therefore contain a revolutionary potential of enormous explosive force.

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[16] Cf. *New Atlantis.*

19. We must look briefly at the two essential stages in the political realization of this hope, because they are of great importance for the development of Christian hope, for a proper understanding of it and of the reasons for its persistence. First there is the French Revolution – an attempt to establish the rule of reason and freedom as a political reality. To begin with, the Europe of the Enlightenment looked on with fascination at these events, but then, as they developed, had cause to reflect anew on reason and freedom. A good illustration of these two phases in the reception of events in France is found in two essays by Immanuel Kant in which he reflects on what had taken place. In 1792 he wrote *Der Sieg des guten Prinzips über das böse und die Gründung eines Reiches Gottes auf Erden* ("The Victory of the Good over the Evil Principle and the Founding of a Kingdom of God on Earth"). In this text he says the following: "The gradual transition of ecclesiastical faith to the exclusive sovereignty of pure religious faith is the coming of the Kingdom of God".[17] He also tells us that revolutions can accelerate this transition from ecclesiastical faith to rational faith. The "Kingdom of God" proclaimed by Jesus receives a new definition here and takes on a new mode of presence; a new "imminent expectation", so to speak, comes into existence: the "Kingdom of God" arrives where "ecclesiastical faith" is vanquished and superseded by "religious faith", that is to say, by simple rational faith. In 1794, in the text *Das Ende aller*

[17] In *Werke* IV, ed. W. Weischedel (1956), p.777. The essay on "The Victory of the Good over the Evil Principle" constitutes the third chapter of the text *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* ("Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone"), which Kant published in 1793.

Dinge ("The End of All Things") a changed image appears. Now Kant considers the possibility that as well as the natural end of all things there may be another that is unnatural, a perverse end. He writes in this connection: "If Christianity should one day cease to be worthy of love ... then the prevailing mode in human thought would be rejection and opposition to it; and the Antichrist ... would begin his – albeit short – regime (presumably based on fear and self-interest); but then, because Christianity, though destined to be the world religion, would not in fact be favoured by destiny to become so, then, in a moral respect, this could lead to the (perverted) end of all things".[18]

20. The nineteenth century held fast to its faith in progress as the new form of human hope, and it continued to consider reason and freedom as the guiding stars to be followed along the path of hope. Nevertheless, the increasingly rapid advance of technical development and the industrialization connected with it soon gave rise to an entirely new social situation: there emerged a class of industrial workers and the so-called "industrial proletariat", whose dreadful living conditions Friedrich Engels described alarmingly in 1845. For his readers, the conclusion is clear: this cannot continue; a change is necessary. Yet the change would shake up and overturn the entire structure of bourgeois society. After the bourgeois revolution of 1789, the time had come for a new, proletarian revolution: progress could not simply continue in small, linear steps. A revolutionary leap was needed. Karl Marx took up the rallying call, and

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[18] I. Kant, *Das Ende aller Dinge,* in *Werke* VI, ed. W. Weischedel (1964), p. 190.

applied his incisive language and intellect to the task of launching this major new and, as he thought, definitive step in history towards salvation – towards what Kant had described as the "Kingdom of God". Once the truth of the hereafter had been rejected, it would then be a question of establishing the truth of the here and now. The critique of Heaven is transformed into the critique of earth, the critique of theology into the critique of politics. Progress towards the better, towards the definitively good world, no longer comes simply from science but from politics – from a scientifically conceived politics that recognizes the structure of history and society and thus points out the road towards revolution, towards all-encompassing change. With great precision, albeit with a certain onesided bias, Marx described the situation of his time, and with great analytical skill he spelled out the paths leading to revolution – and not only theoretically: by means of the Communist Party that came into being from the Communist Manifesto of 1848, he set it in motion. His promise, owing to the acuteness of his analysis and his clear indication of the means for radical change, was and still remains an endless source of fascination. Real revolution followed, in the most radical way in Russia.

21. Together with the victory of the revolution, though, Marx's fundamental error also became evident. He showed precisely how to overthrow the existing order, but he did not say how matters should proceed thereafter. He simply presumed that with the expropriation of the ruling class, with the fall of political power and the socialization of means of production, the new Jerusalem would be realized. Then, indeed, all contradictions would be resolved,

man and the world would finally sort themselves out. Then everything would be able to proceed by itself along the right path, because everything would belong to everyone and all would desire the best for one another. Thus, having accomplished the revolution, Lenin must have realized that the writings of the master gave no indication as to how to proceed. True, Marx had spoken of the interim phase of the dictatorship of the proletariat as a necessity which in time would automatically become redundant. This "intermediate phase" we know all too well, and we also know how it then developed, not ushering in a perfect world, but leaving behind a trail of appalling destruction. Marx not only omitted to work out how this new world would be organized – which should, of course, have been unnecessary. His silence on this matter follows logically from his chosen approach. His error lay deeper. He forgot that man always remains man. He forgot man and he forgot man's freedom. He forgot that freedom always remains also freedom for evil. He thought that once the economy had been put right, everything would automatically be put right. His real error is materialism: man, in fact, is not merely the product of economic conditions, and it is not possible to redeem him purely from the outside by creating a favourable economic environment.

22. Again, we find ourselves facing the question: what may we hope? A self-critique of modernity is needed in dialogue with Christianity and its concept of hope. In this dialogue Christians too, in the context of their knowledge and experience, must learn anew in what their hope truly consists, what they have to offer to the world and what

they cannot offer. Flowing into this self-critique of the modern age there also has to be a self-critique of modern Christianity, which must constantly renew its self-understanding setting out from its roots. On this subject, all we can attempt here are a few brief observations. First we must ask ourselves: what does "progress" really mean; what does it promise and what does it not promise? In the nineteenth century, faith in progress was already subject to critique. In the twentieth century, Theodor W. Adorno formulated the problem of faith in progress quite drastically: he said that progress, seen accurately, is progress from the sling to the atom bomb. Now this is certainly an aspect of progress that must not be concealed. To put it another way: the ambiguity of progress becomes evident. Without doubt, it offers new possibilities for good, but it also opens up appalling possibilities for evil – possibilities that formerly did not exist. We have all witnessed the way in which progress, in the wrong hands, can become and has indeed become a terrifying progress in evil. If technical progress is not matched by corresponding progress in man's ethical formation, in man's inner growth (cf. *Eph* 3:16; *2 Cor* 4:16), then it is not progress at all, but a threat for man and for the world.

23. As far as the two great themes of "reason" and "freedom" are concerned, here we can only touch upon the issues connected with them. Yes indeed, reason is God's great gift to man, and the victory of reason over unreason is also a goal of the Christian life. But when does reason truly triumph? When it is detached from God? When it has become blind to God? Is the reason behind action and capacity for action the whole of reason? If progress,

in order to be progress, needs moral growth on the part of humanity, then the reason behind action and capacity for action is likewise urgently in need of integration through reason's openness to the saving forces of faith, to the differentiation between good and evil. Only thus does reason become truly human. It becomes human only if it is capable of directing the will along the right path, and it is capable of this only if it looks beyond itself. Otherwise, man's situation, in view of the imbalance between his material capacity and the lack of judgement in his heart, becomes a threat for him and for creation. Thus where freedom is concerned, we must remember that human freedom always requires a convergence of various freedoms. Yet this convergence cannot succeed unless it is determined by a common intrinsic criterion of measurement, which is the foundation and goal of our freedom. Let us put it very simply: man needs God, otherwise he remains without hope. Given the developments of the modern age, the quotation from Saint Paul with which I began (*Eph* 2:12) proves to be thoroughly realistic and plainly true. There is no doubt, therefore, that a "Kingdom of God" accomplished without God – a kingdom therefore of man alone – inevitably ends up as the "perverse end" of all things as described by Kant: we have seen it, and we see it over and over again. Yet neither is there any doubt that God truly enters into human affairs only when, rather than being present merely in our thinking, he himself comes towards us and speaks to us. Reason therefore needs faith if it is to be completely itself: reason and faith need one another in order to fulfil their true nature and their mission.

The true shape of Christian hope

24. Let us ask once again: what may we hope? And what may we not hope? First of all, we must acknowledge that incremental progress is possible only in the material sphere. Here, amid our growing knowledge of the structure of matter and in the light of ever more advanced inventions, we clearly see continuous progress towards an ever greater mastery of nature. Yet in the field of ethical awareness and moral decision-making, there is no similar possibility of accumulation for the simple reason that man's freedom is always new and he must always make his decisions anew. These decisions can never simply be made for us in advance by others – if that were the case, we would no longer be free. Freedom presupposes that in fundamental decisions, every person and every generation is a new beginning. Naturally, new generations can build on the knowledge and experience of those who went before, and they can draw upon the moral treasury of the whole of humanity. But they can also reject it, because it can never be self-evident in the same way as material inventions. The moral treasury of humanity is not readily at hand like tools that we use; it is present as an appeal to freedom and a possibility for it. This, however, means that:

a) The right state of human affairs, the moral well-being of the world can never be guaranteed simply through structures alone, however good they are. Such structures are not only important, but necessary; yet they cannot and must not marginalize human freedom. Even the best structures function only when the community is animated by convictions capable of motivating people to assent

freely to the social order. Freedom requires conviction; conviction does not exist on its own, but must always be gained anew by the community.

b) Since man always remains free and since his freedom is always fragile, the kingdom of good will never be definitively established in this world. Anyone who promises the better world that is guaranteed to last for ever is making a false promise; he is overlooking human freedom. Freedom must constantly be won over for the cause of good. Free assent to the good never exists simply by itself. If there were structures which could irrevocably guarantee a determined – good – state of the world, man's freedom would be denied, and hence they would not be good structures at all.

25. What this means is that every generation has the task of engaging anew in the arduous search for the right way to order human affairs; this task is never simply completed. Yet every generation must also make its own contribution to establishing convincing structures of freedom and of good, which can help the following generation as a guideline for the proper use of human freedom; hence, always within human limits, they provide a certain guarantee also for the future. In other words: good structures help, but of themselves they are not enough. Man can never be redeemed simply from outside. Francis Bacon and those who followed in the intellectual current of modernity that he inspired were wrong to believe that man would be redeemed through science. Such an expectation asks too much of science; this kind of hope is deceptive. Science can contribute greatly to making the world and

mankind more human. Yet it can also destroy mankind and the world unless it is steered by forces that lie outside it. On the other hand, we must also acknowledge that modern Christianity, faced with the successes of science in progressively structuring the world, has to a large extent restricted its attention to the individual and his salvation. In so doing it has limited the horizon of its hope and has failed to recognize sufficiently the greatness of its task – even if it has continued to achieve great things in the formation of man and in care for the weak and the suffering.

26. It is not science that redeems man: man is redeemed by love. This applies even in terms of this present world. When someone has the experience of a great love in his life, this is a moment of "redemption" which gives a new meaning to his life. But soon he will also realize that the love bestowed upon him cannot by itself resolve the question of his life. It is a love that remains fragile. It can be destroyed by death. The human being needs unconditional love. He needs the certainty which makes him say: "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (*Rom* 8:38-39). If this absolute love exists, with its absolute certainty, then – only then – is man "redeemed", whatever should happen to him in his particular circumstances. This is what it means to say: Jesus Christ has "redeemed" us. Through him we have become certain of God, a God who is not a remote "first cause" of the world, because his only-begotten Son has become man and of him everyone can

say: "I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (*Gal* 2:20).

27. In this sense it is true that anyone who does not know God, even though he may entertain all kinds of hopes, is ultimately without hope, without the great hope that sustains the whole of life (cf. *Eph* 2:12). Man's great, true hope which holds firm in spite of all disappointments can only be God – God who has loved us and who continues to love us "to the end," until all "is accomplished" (cf. *Jn* 13:1 and 19:30). Whoever is moved by love begins to perceive what "life" really is. He begins to perceive the meaning of the word of hope that we encountered in the Baptismal Rite: from faith I await "eternal life" – the true life which, whole and unthreatened, in all its fullness, is simply life. Jesus, who said that he had come so that we might have life and have it in its fullness, in abundance (cf. *Jn* 10:10), has also explained to us what "life" means: "this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (*Jn* 17:3). Life in its true sense is not something we have exclusively in or from ourselves: it is a relationship. And life in its totality is a relationship with him who is the source of life. If we are in relation with him who does not die, who is Life itself and Love itself, then we are in life. Then we "live".

28. Yet now the question arises: are we not in this way falling back once again into an individualistic understanding of salvation, into hope for myself alone, which is not true hope since it forgets and overlooks others? Indeed we are not! Our relationship with God is established through communion with Jesus – we cannot achieve it alone

or from our own resources alone. The relationship with Jesus, however, is a relationship with the one who gave himself as a ransom for all (cf. *1 Tim* 2:6). Being in communion with Jesus Christ draws us into his "being for all"; it makes it our own way of being. He commits us to live for others, but only through communion with him does it become possible truly to be there for others, for the whole. In this regard I would like to quote the great Greek Doctor of the Church, Maximus the Confessor (†662), who begins by exhorting us to prefer nothing to the knowledge and love of God, but then quickly moves on to practicalities: "The one who loves God cannot hold on to money but rather gives it out in God's fashion ... in the same manner in accordance with the measure of justice".[19] Love of God leads to participation in the justice and generosity of God towards others. Loving God requires an interior freedom from all possessions and all material goods: the love of God is revealed in responsibility for others.[20] This same connection between love of God and responsibility for others can be seen in a striking way in the life of Saint Augustine. After his conversion to the Christian faith, he decided, together with some like-minded friends, to lead a life totally dedicated to the word of God and to things eternal. His intention was to practise a Christian version of the ideal of the contemplative life expressed in the great tradition of Greek philosophy, choosing in this way the "better part" (cf. *Lk* 10:42). Things turned out differently, however. While attending the Sunday liturgy at the port

[19] *Chapters on charity, Centuria* 1, ch. 1: *PG* 90, 965.

[20] Cf. *ibid.*: *PG* 90, 962-966.

city of Hippo, he was called out from the assembly by the Bishop and constrained to receive ordination for the exercise of the priestly ministry in that city. Looking back on that moment, he writes in his *Confessions:* "Terrified by my sins and the weight of my misery, I had resolved in my heart, and meditated flight into the wilderness; but you forbade me and gave me strength, by saying: 'Christ died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died' (cf. *2 Cor* 5: 15)".[21] Christ died for all. To live for him means allowing oneself to be drawn into his *being for others.*

29. For Augustine this meant a totally new life. He once described his daily life in the following terms: "The turbulent have to be corrected, the faint-hearted cheered up, the weak supported; the Gospel's opponents need to be refuted, its insidious enemies guarded against; the unlearned need to be taught, the indolent stirred up, the argumentative checked; the proud must be put in their place, the desperate set on their feet, those engaged in quarrels reconciled; the needy have to be helped, the oppressed to be liberated, the good to be encouraged, the bad to be tolerated; all must be loved".[22] "The Gospel terrifies me"[23] – producing that healthy fear which prevents us from living for ourselves alone and compels us to pass on the hope we hold in common. Amid the serious difficulties facing the Roman Empire – and also posing a serious threat to Roman Africa,

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[21] *Conf.* X 43, 70: *CSEL* 33, 279.

[22] *Sermo* 340, 3: *PL* 38, 1484; cf. F. Van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop,* London and New York 1961, p. 268.

[23] *Sermo* 339, 4: *PL* 38, 1481.

which was actually destroyed at the end of Augustine's life – this was what he set out to do: to transmit hope, the hope which came to him from faith and which, in complete contrast with his introverted temperament, enabled him to take part decisively and with all his strength in the task of building up the city. In the same chapter of the *Confessions* in which we have just noted the decisive reason for his commitment "for all", he says that Christ "intercedes for us, otherwise I should despair. My weaknesses are many and grave, many and grave indeed, but more abundant still is your medicine. We might have thought that your word was far distant from union with man, and so we might have despaired of ourselves, if this Word had not become flesh and dwelt among us".[24] On the strength of his hope, Augustine dedicated himself completely to the ordinary people and to his city – renouncing his spiritual nobility; he preached and acted in a simple way for simple people.

30. Let us summarize what has emerged so far in the course of our reflections. Day by day, man experiences many greater or lesser hopes, different in kind according to the different periods of his life. Sometimes one of these hopes may appear to be totally satisfying without any need for other hopes. Young people can have the hope of a great and fully satisfying love; the hope of a certain position in their profession, or of some success that will prove decisive for the rest of their lives. When these hopes are fulfilled, however, it becomes clear that they were not, in reality, the whole. It becomes evident that man has need of a hope that goes further. It becomes clear that only

[24] *Conf.* X 43, 69: *CSEL* 33, 279.

something infinite will suffice for him, something that will always be more than he can ever attain. In this regard our contemporary age has developed the hope of creating a perfect world that, thanks to scientific knowledge and to scientifically based politics, seemed to be achievable. Thus Biblical hope in the Kingdom of God has been displaced by hope in the kingdom of man, the hope of a better world which would be the real "Kingdom of God". This seemed at last to be the great and realistic hope that man needs. It was capable of galvanizing – for a time – all man's energies. The great objective seemed worthy of full commitment. In the course of time, however, it has become clear that this hope is constantly receding. Above all it has become apparent that this may be a hope for a future generation, but not for me.

And however much "for all" may be part of the great hope – since I cannot be happy without others or in opposition to them – it remains true that a hope that does not concern me personally is not a real hope. It has also become clear that this hope is opposed to freedom, since human affairs depend in each generation on the free decisions of those concerned. If this freedom were to be taken away, as a result of certain conditions or structures, then ultimately this world would not be good, since a world without freedom can by no means be a good world. Hence, while we must always be committed to the improvement of the world, tomorrow's better world cannot be the proper and sufficient content of our hope. And in this regard the question always arises: when is the world "better"? What makes it good? By what standard are we to judge its goodness? What are the paths that lead to this "goodness"?

31. Let us say once again: we need the greater and lesser hopes that keep us going day by day. But these are not enough without the great hope, which must surpass everything else. This great hope can only be God, who encompasses the whole of reality and who can bestow upon us what we, by ourselves, cannot attain. The fact that it comes to us as a gift is actually part of hope. God is the foundation of hope: not any god, but the God who has a human face and who has loved us to the end, each one of us and humanity in its entirety. His Kingdom is not an imaginary hereafter, situated in a future that will never arrive; his Kingdom is present wherever he is loved and wherever his love reaches us. His love alone gives us the possibility of soberly persevering day by day, without ceas ing to be spurred on by hope, in a world which by its very nature is imperfect. His love is at the same time our guarantee of the existence of what we only vaguely sense and which nevertheless, in our deepest self, we await: a life that is "truly" life. Let us now, in the final section, develop this idea in more detail as we focus our attention on some of the "settings" in which we can learn in practice about hope and its exercise.

"Settings" for learning and practising hope

I. Prayer as a school of hope

32. A first essential setting for learning hope is prayer. When no one listens to me any more, God still listens to me. When I can no longer talk to anyone or call upon anyone, I can always talk to God. When there is no longer anyone to help me deal with a need or expectation that goes beyond the human capacity for hope, he can help

me.[25] When I have been plunged into complete solitude...; if I pray I am never totally alone. The late Cardinal Nguyen Van Thuan, a prisoner for thirteen years, nine of them spent in solitary confinement, has left us a precious little book: *Prayers of Hope*. During thirteen years in jail, in a situation of seemingly utter hopelessness, the fact that he could listen and speak to God became for him an increasing power of hope, which enabled him, after his release, to become for people all over the world a witness to hope – to that great hope which does not wane even in the nights of solitude.

33. Saint Augustine, in a homily on the *First Letter of John*, describes very beautifully the intimate relationship between prayer and hope. He defines prayer as an exercise of desire. Man was created for greatness – for God himself; he was created to be filled by God. But his heart is too small for the greatness to which it is destined. It must be stretched. "By delaying [his gift], God strengthens our desire; through desire he enlarges our soul and by expanding it he increases its capacity [for receiving him]". Augustine refers to Saint Paul, who speaks of himself as straining forward to the things that are to come (cf. *Phil* 3:13). He then uses a very beautiful image to describe this process of enlargement and preparation of the human heart. "Suppose that God wishes to fill you with honey [a symbol of God's tenderness and goodness]; but if you are full of vinegar, where will you put the honey?" The vessel, that is your heart, must first be enlarged and then cleansed, freed from the

[25] Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2657.

vinegar and its taste. This requires hard work and is painful, but in this way alone do we become suited to that for which we are destined.[26] Even if Augustine speaks directly only of our capacity for God, it is nevertheless clear that through this effort by which we are freed from vinegar and the taste of vinegar, not only are we made free for God, but we also become open to others. It is only by becoming children of God, that we can be with our common Father. To pray is not to step outside history and withdraw to our own private corner of happiness. When we pray properly, we undergo a process of inner purification which opens us up to God and thus to our fellow human beings as well. In prayer we must learn what we can truly ask of God – what is worthy of God. We must learn that we cannot pray against others. We must learn that we cannot ask for the superficial and comfortable things that we desire at this moment – that meager, misplaced hope that leads us away from God. We must learn to purify our desires and our hopes. We must free ourselves from the hidden lies with which we deceive ourselves. God sees through them, and when we come before God, we too are forced to recognize them. "But who can discern his errors? Clear me from hidden faults" prays the Psalmist (*Ps* 19:12 [18:13]). Failure to recognize my guilt, the illusion of my innocence, does not justify me and does not save me, because I am culpable for the numbness of my conscience and my incapacity to recognize the evil in me for what it is. If God does not exist, perhaps I have to seek refuge in these lies, because there is no one who can forgive me; no one who is the

[26] Cf. *In 1 Ioannis* 4, 6: *PL* 35, 2008f.

true criterion. Yet my encounter with God awakens my conscience in such a way that it no longer aims at self-justification, and is no longer a mere reflection of me and those of my contemporaries who shape my thinking, but it becomes a capacity for listening to the Good itself.

34. For prayer to develop this power of purification, it must on the one hand be something very personal, an encounter between my intimate self and God, the living God. On the other hand it must be constantly guided and enlightened by the great prayers of the Church and of the saints, by liturgical prayer, in which the Lord teaches us again and again how to pray properly. Cardinal Nguyen Van Thuan, in his book of spiritual exercises, tells us that during his life there were long periods when he was unable to pray and that he would hold fast to the texts of the Church's prayer: the Our Father, the Hail Mary and the prayers of the liturgy.[27] Praying must always involve this intermingling of public and personal prayer. This is how we can speak to God and how God speaks to us. In this way we undergo those purifications by which we become open to God and are prepared for the service of our fellow human beings. We become capable of the great hope, and thus we become ministers of hope for others. Hope in a Christian sense is always hope for others as well. It is an active hope, in which we struggle to prevent things moving towards the "perverse end". It is an active hope also in the sense that we keep the world open to God. Only in this way does it continue to be a truly human hope.

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[27] *Testimony of Hope,* Boston 2000, pp. 121ff.

II. Action and suffering as settings for learning hope

35. All serious and upright human conduct is hope in action. This is so first of all in the sense that we thereby strive to realize our lesser and greater hopes, to complete this or that task which is important for our onward journey, or we work towards a brighter and more humane world so as to open doors into the future. Yet our daily efforts in pursuing our own lives and in working for the world's future either tire us or turn into fanaticism, unless we are enlightened by the radiance of the great hope that cannot be destroyed even by small-scale failures or by a breakdown in matters of historic importance. If we cannot hope for more than is effectively attainable at any given time, or more than is promised by political or economic authorities, our lives will soon be without hope. It is important to know that I can always continue to hope, even if in my own life, or the historical period in which I am living, there seems to be nothing left to hope for. Only the great certitude of hope that my own life and history in general, despite all failures, are held firm by the indestructible power of Love, and that this gives them their meaning and importance, only this kind of hope can then give the courage to act and to persevere. Certainly we cannot "build" the Kingdom of God by our own efforts – what we build will always be the kingdom of man with all the limitations proper to our human nature. The Kingdom of God is a gift, and precisely because of this, it is great and beautiful, and constitutes the response to our hope. And we cannot – to use the classical expression – "merit" Heaven through our works. Heaven is always more than we could merit, just as being loved is never something "merited", but always a gift. However, even when we are fully aware that Heaven far

exceeds what we can merit, it will always be true that our behaviour is not indifferent before God and therefore is not indifferent for the unfolding of history. We can open ourselves and the world and allow God to enter: we can open ourselves to truth, to love, to what is good. This is what the saints did, those who, as "God's fellow workers", contributed to the world's salvation (cf. *1 Cor* 3:9; *1 Th* 3:2). We can free our life and the world from the poisons and contaminations that could destroy the present and the future. We can uncover the sources of creation and keep them unsullied, and in this way we can make a right use of creation, which comes to us as a gift, according to its intrinsic requirements and ultimate purpose. This makes sense even if outwardly we achieve nothing or seem powerless in the face of overwhelming hostile forces. So on the one hand, our actions engender hope for us and for others; but at the same time, it is the great hope based upon God's promises that gives us courage and directs our action in good times and bad.

36. Like action, suffering is a part of our human existence. Suffering stems partly from our finitude, and partly from the mass of sin which has accumulated over the course of history, and continues to grow unabated today. Certainly we must do whatever we can to reduce suffering: to avoid as far as possible the suffering of the innocent; to soothe pain; to give assistance in overcoming mental suffering. These are obligations both in justice and in love, and they are included among the fundamental requirements of the Christian life and every truly human life. Great progress has been made in the battle against physical pain; yet the sufferings of the innocent and mental suffering have, if

[for] anything, increased in recent decades. Indeed, we must do all we can to overcome suffering, but to banish it from the world altogether is not in our power. This is simply because we are unable to shake off our finitude and because none of us is capable of eliminating the power of evil, of sin which, as we plainly see, is a constant source of suffering. Only God is able to do this: only a God who personally enters history by making himself man and suffering within history. We know that this God exists, and hence that this power to "take away the sin of the world" (John 1:29) is present in the world. Through faith in the existence of this power, hope for the world's healing has emerged in history. It is, however, hope – not yet fulfillment; hope that gives us the courage to place ourselves on the side of good even in seemingly hopeless situations, aware that, as far as the external course of history is concerned, the power of sin will continue to be a terrible presence.

37. Let us return to our topic. We can try to limit suffering, to fight against it, but we cannot eliminate it. It is when we attempt to avoid suffering by withdrawing from anything that might involve hurt, when we try to spare ourselves the effort and pain of pursuing truth, love, and goodness that we drift into a life of emptiness, in which there may be almost no pain, but the dark sensation of meaninglessness and abandonment is all the greater. It is not by sidestepping or fleeing from suffering that we are healed, but rather by our capacity for accepting it, maturing through it and finding meaning through union with Christ, who suffered with infinite love. In this context, I would like to quote a passage from a letter written by the Vietnamese martyr Paul

Le-Bao-Tinh (†1857) which illustrates this transformation of suffering through the power of hope springing from faith. "I, Paul, in chains for the name of Christ, wish to relate to you the trials besetting me daily, in order that you may be inflamed with love for God and join with me in his praises, for his mercy is for ever (*Ps* 136 [135]). The prison here is a true image of everlasting Hell: to cruel tortures of every kind – shackles, iron chains, manacles – are added hatred, vengeance, calumnies, obscene speech, quarrels, evil acts, swearing, curses, as well as anguish and grief. But the God who once freed the three children from the fiery furnace is with me always; he has delivered me from these tribulations and made them sweet, for his mercy is for ever. In the midst of these torments, which usually terrify others, I am, by the grace of God, full of joy and gladness, because I am not alone – Christ is with me ... How am I to bear with the spectacle, as each day I see emperors, mandarins, and their retinue blaspheming your holy name, O Lord, who are enthroned above the Cherubim and Seraphim? (cf. *Ps* 80:1 [79:2]). Behold, the pagans have trodden your Cross underfoot! Where is your glory? As I see all this, I would, in the ardent love I have for you, prefer to be torn limb from limb and to die as a witness to your love. O Lord, show your power, save me, sustain me, that in my infirmity your power may be shown and may be glorified before the nations ... Beloved brothers, as you hear all these things may you give endless thanks in joy to God, from whom every good proceeds; bless the Lord with me, for his mercy is for ever ... I write these things to you in order that your faith and mine may be united. In the midst of this storm I cast my anchor towards the throne of God, the anchor that is the lively hope in my

heart".[28] This is a letter from "Hell". It lays bare all the horror of a concentration camp, where to the torments inflicted by tyrants upon their victims is added the outbreak of evil in the victims themselves, such that they in turn become further instruments of their persecutors' cruelty. This is indeed a letter from Hell, but it also reveals the truth of the Psalm text: "If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I sink to the nether world, you are present there ... If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall hide me, and night shall be my light' – for you darkness itself is not dark, and night shines as the day; darkness and light are the same" (*Ps* 139 [138]:8-12; cf. also *Ps* 23 [22]:4). Christ descended into "Hell" and is therefore close to those cast into it, transforming their darkness into light. Suffering and torment is still terrible and well-nigh unbearable. Yet the star of hope has risen – the anchor of the heart reaches the very throne of God. Instead of evil being unleashed within man, the light shines victorious: suffering – without ceasing to be suffering – becomes, despite everything, a hymn of praise.

38. The true measure of humanity is essentially determined in relationship to suffering and to the sufferer. This holds true both for the individual and for society. A society unable to accept its suffering members and incapable of helping to share their suffering and to bear it inwardly through "com-passion" is a cruel and inhuman society. Yet society cannot accept its suffering members and support them in their trials unless individuals are capable of doing so themselves; moreover, the individual cannot accept another's suffering unless he personally is able to find

[28] The Liturgy of the Hours, Office of Readings, 24 November.

meaning in suffering, a path of purification and growth in maturity, a journey of hope. Indeed, to accept the "other" who suffers means that I take up his suffering in such a way that it becomes mine also. Because it has now become a shared suffering, though, in which another person is present, this suffering is penetrated by the light of love. The Latin word *con-solatio,* "consolation", expresses this beautifully. It suggests *being with* the other in his solitude, so that it ceases to be solitude. Furthermore, the capacity to accept suffering for the sake of goodness, truth and justice is an essential criterion of humanity, because if my own well-being and safety are ultimately more important than truth and justice, then the power of the stronger prevails, then violence and untruth reign supreme. Truth and justice must stand above my comfort and physical well-being, or else my life itself becomes a lie. In the end, even the "yes" to love is a source of suffering, because love always requires expropriations of my "I", in which I allow myself to be pruned and wounded. Love simply cannot exist without this painful renunciation of [me], for otherwise it becomes pure selfishness and thereby ceases to be love.

39. To suffer with the other and for others; to suffer for the sake of truth and justice; to suffer out of love and in order to become a person who truly loves – these are fundamental elements of humanity, and to abandon them would destroy man himself. Yet once again the question arises: are we capable of this? Is the other important enough to warrant my becoming, on his account, a person who suffers? Does truth matter to me enough to make suffering worthwhile? Is the promise of love so great that it justifies the gift of myself? In the history of humanity, it was the

Christian faith that had the particular merit of bringing forth within man a new and deeper capacity for these kinds of suffering that are decisive for his humanity. The Christian faith has shown us that truth, justice and love are not simply ideals, but enormously weighty realities. It has shown us that God – Truth and Love in person – desired to suffer for us and with us. Bernard of Clairvaux coined the marvellous expression: *Impassibilis est Deus, sed non incompassibilis*[29] – God cannot suffer, but he can *suffer with*. Man is worth so much to God that he himself became man in order to *suffer with* man in an utterly real way – in flesh and blood – as is revealed to us in the account of Jesus's Passion. Hence in all human suffering we are joined by one who experiences and carries that suffering *with* us; hence *con-solatio* is present in all suffering, the consolation of God's compassionate love – and so the star of hope rises. Certainly, in our many different sufferings and trials we always need the lesser and greater hopes too – a kind visit, the healing of internal and external wounds, a favourable resolution of a crisis, and so on. In our lesser trials these kinds of hope may even be sufficient. But in truly great trials, where I must make a definitive decision to place the truth before my own welfare, career and possessions, I need the certitude of that true, great hope of which we have spoken here. For this too we need witnesses – martyrs – who have given themselves totally, so as to show us the way – day after day. We need them if we are to prefer goodness to comfort, even in the little choices we face each day – knowing that this is how we

[29] *Sermones in Cant., Sermo* 26, 5: *PL* 183, 906.

live life to the full. Let us say it once again: the capacity to suffer for the sake of the truth is the measure of humanity. Yet this capacity to suffer depends on the type and extent of the hope that we bear within us and build upon. The saints were able to make the great journey of human existence in the way that Christ had done before them, because they were brimming with great hope.

40. I would like to add here another brief comment with some relevance for everyday living. There used to be a form of devotion – perhaps less practised today but quite widespread not long ago – that included the idea of "offering up" the minor daily hardships that continually strike at us like irritating "jabs", thereby giving them a meaning. Of course, there were some exaggerations and perhaps unhealthy applications of this devotion, but we need to ask ourselves whether there may not after all have been something essential and helpful contained within it. What does it mean to offer something up? Those who did so were convinced that they could insert these little annoyances into Christ's great "com-passion" so that they somehow became part of the treasury of compassion so greatly needed by the human race. In this way, even the small inconveniences of daily life could acquire meaning and contribute to the economy of good and of human love. Maybe we should consider whether it might be judicious to revive this practice ourselves.

III. Judgement as a setting for learning and practising hope

41. At the conclusion of the central section of the Church's great *Credo* – the part that recounts the mystery

of Christ, from his eternal birth of the Father and his temporal birth of the Virgin Mary, through his Cross and Resurrection to the second coming – we find the phrase: "he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead". From the earliest times, the prospect of the Judgement has influenced Christians in their daily living as a criterion by which to order their present life, as a summons to their conscience, and at the same time as hope in God's justice. Faith in Christ has never looked merely backwards or merely upwards, but always also forwards to the hour of justice that the Lord repeatedly proclaimed. This looking ahead has given Christianity its importance for the present moment. In the arrangement of Christian sacred buildings, which were intended to make visible the historic and cosmic breadth of faith in Christ, it became customary to depict the Lord returning as a king – the symbol of hope – at the east end; while the west wall normally portrayed the Last Judgement as a symbol of our responsibility for our lives – a scene which followed and accompanied the faithful as they went out to resume their daily routine. As the iconography of the Last Judgement developed, however, more and more prominence was given to its ominous and frightening aspects, which obviously held more fascination for artists than the splendour of hope, often all too well concealed beneath the horrors.

42. In the modern era, the idea of the Last Judgement has faded into the background: Christian faith has been individualized and primarily oriented towards the salvation of the believer's own soul, while reflection on world history is largely dominated by the idea of progress. The fundamental content of awaiting a final Judgement, however,

has not disappeared: it has simply taken on a totally different form. The atheism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is – in its origins and aims – a type of moralism: a protest against the injustices of the world and of world history. A world marked by so much injustice, innocent suffering, and cynicism of power cannot be the work of a good God. A God with responsibility for such a world would not be a just God, much less a good God. It is for the sake of morality that this God has to be contested. Since there is no God to create justice, it seems man himself is now called to establish justice. If in the face of this world's suffering, protest against God is understandable, the claim that humanity can and must do what no God actually does or is able to do is both presumptuous and intrinsically false. It is no accident that this idea has led to the greatest forms of cruelty and violations of justice; rather, it is grounded in the intrinsic falsity of the claim. A world which has to create its own justice is a world without hope. No one and nothing can answer for centuries of suffering. No one and nothing can guarantee that the cynicism of power – whatever beguiling ideological mask it adopts – will cease to dominate the world. This is why the great thinkers of the Frankfurt School, Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, were equally critical of atheism and theism. Horkheimer radically excluded the possibility of ever finding a this-worldly substitute for God, while at the same time he rejected the image of a good and just God. In an extreme radicalization of the Old Testament prohibition of images, he speaks of a "longing for the totally Other" that remains inaccessible – a cry of yearning directed at world history. Adorno also firmly upheld this total rejection of

images, which naturally meant the exclusion of any "image" of a loving God. On the other hand, he also constantly emphasized this "negative" dialectic and asserted that justice – true justice – would require a world "where not only present suffering would be wiped out, but also that which is irrevocably past would be undone".[30] This, would mean, however – to express it with positive and hence, for him, inadequate symbols – that there can be no justice without a resurrection of the dead. Yet this would have to involve "the resurrection of the flesh, something that is totally foreign to idealism and the realm of Absolute spirit".[31]

43. Christians likewise can and must constantly learn from the strict rejection of images that is contained in God's first commandment (cf. *Ex* 20:4). The truth of negative theology was highlighted by the Fourth Lateran Council, which explicitly stated that however great the similarity that may be established between Creator and creature, the dissimilarity between them is always greater.[32] In any case, for the believer the rejection of images cannot be carried so far that one ends up, as Horkheimer and Adorno would like, by saying "no" to both theses – theism and atheism. God has given himself an "image": in Christ who was made man. In him who was crucified, the denial of false images of God is taken to an extreme. God now reveals his true face in the figure of the sufferer who shares man's God-forsaken condition by taking it upon himself. This

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[30] *Negative Dialektik* (1966), Third part, III, 11, in *Gesammelte Schriften* VI, Frankfurt am Main 1973, p. 395.

[31] *Ibid.*, Second part, p. 207.

[32] DS 806.

innocent sufferer has attained the certitude of hope: there is a God, and God can create justice in a way that we cannot conceive, yet we can begin to grasp it through faith. Yes, there is a resurrection of the flesh.[33] There is justice.[34] There is an "undoing" of past suffering, a reparation that sets things aright. For this reason, faith in the Last Judgement is first and foremost hope – the need for which was made abundantly clear in the upheavals of recent centuries. I am convinced that the question of justice constitutes the essential argument, or in any case the strongest argument, in favour of faith in eternal life. The purely individual need for a fulfilment that is denied to us in this life, for an everlasting love that we await, is certainly an important motive for believing that man was made for eternity; but only in connection with the impossibility that the injustice of history should be the final word does the necessity for Christ's return and for new life become fully convincing.

44. To protest against God in the name of justice is not helpful. A world without God is a world without hope (cf. *Eph* 2:12). Only God can create justice. And faith gives us the certainty that he does so. The image of the Last Judgement is not primarily an image of terror, but an image of hope; for us it may even be the decisive image of hope. Is it not also a frightening image? I would say: it is an image that evokes responsibility, an image, therefore, of that fear of which Saint Hilary spoke when he said that all our fear has its place in love.[35] God is justice and

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[33] Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* 988-1004.

[34] Cf. *ibid.,* 1040.

[35] Cf. *Tractatus super Psalmos, Ps* 127, 1-3: *CSEL* 22, 628-630.

creates justice. This is our consolation and our hope. And in his justice there is also grace. This we know by turning our gaze to the crucified and risen Christ. Both these things – justice and grace – must be seen in their correct inner relationship. Grace does not cancel out justice. It does not make wrong into right. It is not a sponge which wipes everything away, so that whatever someone has done on earth ends up being of equal value. Dostoevsky, for example, was right to protest against this kind of Heaven and this kind of grace in his novel *The Brothers Karamazov.* Evildoers, in the end, do not sit at table at the eternal banquet beside their victims without distinction, as though nothing had happened. Here I would like to quote a passage from Plato which expresses a premonition of just judgement that in many respects remains true and salutary for Christians too. Albeit using mythological images, he expresses the truth with an unambiguous clarity, saying that in the end souls will stand naked before the judge. It no longer matters what they once were in history, but only what they are in truth: "Often, when it is the king or some other monarch or potentate that he (the judge) has to deal with, he finds that there is no soundness in the soul whatever; he finds it scourged and scarred by the various acts of perjury and wrong-doing ...; it is twisted and warped by lies and vanity, and nothing is straight because truth has had no part in its development. Power, luxury, pride, and debauchery have left it so full of disproportion and ugliness that when he has inspected it (he) sends it straight to prison, where on its arrival it will undergo the appropriate punishment ... Sometimes, though, the eye of the judge lights on a different soul which has lived in purity and truth ... then he is struck with admira-

tion and sends him to the isles of the blessed".[36] In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (cf. *Lk* 16:19-31), Jesus admonishes us through the image of a soul destroyed by arrogance and opulence, who has created an impassable chasm between himself and the poor man; the chasm of being trapped within material pleasures; the chasm of forgetting the other, of incapacity to love, which then becomes a burning and unquenchable thirst. We must note that in this parable Jesus is not referring to the final destiny after the Last Judgement, but is taking up a notion found, *inter alia,* in early Judaism, namely that of an intermediate state between death and resurrection, a state in which the final sentence is yet to be pronounced.

45. This early Jewish idea of an intermediate state includes the view that these souls are not simply in a sort of temporary custody but, as the parable of the rich man illustrates, are already being punished or are experiencing a provisional form of bliss. There is also the idea that this state can involve purification and healing which mature the soul for communion with God. The early Church took up these concepts, and in the Western Church they gradually developed into the doctrine of Purgatory. We do not need to examine here the complex historical paths of this development; it is enough to ask what it actually means. With death, our life-choice becomes definitive – our life stands before the judge. Our choice, which in the course of an entire life takes on a certain shape, can have a variety of forms. There can be people who have totally destroyed their desire for truth and readiness to love, people for

[36] *Gorgias* 525a-526c.

whom everything has become a lie, people who have lived for hatred and have suppressed all love within themselves. This is a terrifying thought, but alarming profiles of this type can be seen in certain figures of our own history. In such people all would be beyond remedy and the destruction of good would be irrevocable: this is what we mean by the word *Hell.*[37] On the other hand there can be people who are utterly pure, completely permeated by God, and thus fully open to their neighbours – people for whom communion with God even now gives direction to their entire being and whose journey towards God only brings to fulfillment what they already are.[38]

46. Yet we know from experience that neither case is normal in human life. For the great majority of people – we may suppose – there remains in the depths of their being an ultimate interior openness to truth, to love, to God. In the concrete choices of life, however, it is covered over by ever new compromises with evil – much filth covers purity, but the thirst for purity remains and it still constantly re-emerges from all that is base and remains present in the soul. What happens to such individuals when they appear before the Judge? Will all the impurity they have amassed through life suddenly cease to matter? What else might occur? Saint Paul, in his *First Letter to the Corinthians,* gives us an idea of the differing impact of God's judgement according to each person's particular circumstances. He does this using images which in some way try to express the invisible, without it being possible

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[37] Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* 1033-1037.

[38] Cf. *ibid.,* 1023-1029.

for us to conceptualize these images – simply because we can neither see into the world beyond death nor do we have any experience of it. Paul begins by saying that Christian life is built upon a common foundation: Jesus Christ. This foundation endures. If we have stood firm on this foundation and built our life upon it, we know that it cannot be taken away from us even in death. Then Paul continues: "Now if any one builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw – each man's work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire" (*1 Cor* 3:12-15). In this text, it is in any case evident that our salvation can take different forms, that some of what is built may be burned down, that in order to be saved we personally have to pass through "fire" so as to become fully open to receiving God and able to take our place at the table of the eternal marriage-feast.

47. Some recent theologians are of the opinion that the fire which both burns and saves is Christ himself, the Judge and Saviour. The encounter with him is the decisive act of judgement. Before his gaze all falsehood melts away. This encounter with him, as it burns us, transforms and frees us, allowing us to become truly ourselves. All that we build during our lives can prove to be mere straw, pure bluster, and it collapses. Yet in the pain of this encounter, when the impurity and sickness of our lives become evident to us, there lies salvation. His gaze, the touch of his heart

heals us through an undeniably painful transformation "as through fire". But it is a blessed pain, in which the holy power of his love sears through us like a flame, enabling us to become totally ourselves and thus totally of God. In this way the inter-relation between justice and grace also becomes clear: the way we live our lives is not immaterial, but our defilement does not stain us for ever if we have at least continued to reach out towards Christ, towards truth and towards love. Indeed, it has already been burned away through Christ's Passion. At the moment of judgement we experience and we absorb the overwhelming power of his love over all the evil in the world and in ourselves. The pain of love becomes our salvation and our joy. It is clear that we cannot calculate the "duration" of this transforming burning in terms of the chronological measurements of this world. The transforming "moment" of this encounter eludes earthly time-reckoning – it is the heart's time, it is the time of "passage" to communion with God in the Body of Christ.[39] The judgement of God is hope, both because it is justice and because it is grace. If it were merely grace, making all earthly things cease to matter, God would still owe us an answer to the question about justice – the crucial question that we ask of history and of God. If it were merely justice, in the end it could bring only fear to us all. The incarnation of God in Christ has so closely linked the two together – judgement and grace – that justice is firmly established: we all work out our salvation "with fear and trembling" (*Phil* 2:12). Nevertheless grace allows us all to hope, and to go trustfully to meet the Judge whom we know as our "advocate", or *parakletos* (cf. *1 Jn* 2:1).

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[39] Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* 1030-1032.

48. A further point must be mentioned here, because it is important for the practice of Christian hope. Early Jewish thought includes the idea that one can help the deceased in their intermediate state through prayer (see for example *2 Macc* 12:38-45; first century BC). The equivalent practice was readily adopted by Christians and is common to the Eastern and Western Church. The East does not recognize the purifying and expiatory suffering of souls in the afterlife, but it does acknowledge various levels of beatitude and of suffering in the intermediate state. The souls of the departed can, however, receive "solace and refreshment" through the Eucharist, prayer and almsgiving. The belief that love can reach into the afterlife, that reciprocal giving and receiving is possible, in which our affection for one another continues beyond the limits of death – this has been a fundamental conviction of Christianity throughout the ages and it remains a source of comfort today. Who would not feel the need to convey to their departed loved ones a sign of kindness, a gesture of gratitude or even a request for pardon? Now a further question arises: if "Purgatory" is simply purification through fire in the encounter with the Lord, Judge and Saviour, how can a third person intervene, even if he or she is particularly close to the other? When we ask such a question, we should recall that no man is an island, entire of itself. Our lives are involved with one another, through innumerable interactions they are linked together. No one lives alone. No one sins alone. No one is saved alone. The lives of others continually spill over into mine: in what I think, say, do and achieve. And conversely, my life spills over into that of others: for better and for worse. So my prayer for another is not something extraneous to that person, something external, not

even after death. In the interconnectedness of Being, my gratitude to the other – my prayer for him – can play a small part in his purification. And for that there is no need to convert earthly time into God's time: in the communion of souls simple terrestrial time is superseded. It is never too late to touch the heart of another, nor is it ever in vain. In this way we further clarify an important element of the Christian concept of hope. Our hope is always essentially also hope for others; only thus is it truly hope for me too.[40] As Christians we should never limit ourselves to asking: how can I save myself? We should also ask: what can I do in order that others may be saved and that for them too the star of hope may rise? Then I will have done my utmost for my own personal salvation as well.

Mary, Star of Hope

49. With a hymn composed in the eighth or ninth century, thus for over a thousand years, the Church has greeted Mary, the Mother of God, as "Star of the Sea": *Ave maris stella*. Human life is a journey. Towards what destination? How do we find the way? Life is like a voyage on the sea of history, often dark and stormy, a voyage in which we watch for the stars that indicate the route. The true stars of our life are the people who have lived good lives. They are lights of hope. Certainly, Jesus Christ is the true light, the sun that has risen above all the shadows of history. But to reach him we also need lights close by – people who shine with his light and so guide us along our way. Who more than Mary could be a star of hope for us? With her

[40] Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1032.

"yes" she opened the door of our world to God himself; she became the living Ark of the Covenant, in whom God took flesh, became one of us, and pitched his tent among us (cf. *Jn* 1:14).

50. So we cry to her: Holy Mary, you belonged to the humble and great souls of Israel who, like Simeon, were "looking for the consolation of Israel" (*Lk* 2:25) and hoping, like Anna, "for the redemption of Jerusalem" (*Lk* 2:38). Your life was thoroughly imbued with the sacred scriptures of Israel which spoke of hope, of the promise made to Abraham and his descendants (cf. *Lk* 1:55). In this way we can appreciate the holy fear that overcame you when the angel of the Lord appeared to you and told you that you would give birth to the One who was the hope of Israel, the One awaited by the world. Through you, through your "yes", the hope of the ages became reality, entering this world and its history. You bowed low before the greatness of this task and gave your consent: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (*Lk* 1:38). When you hastened with holy joy across the mountains of Judea to see your cousin Elizabeth, you became the image of the Church to come, which carries the hope of the world in her womb across the mountains of history. But alongside the joy which, with your *Magnificat,* you proclaimed in word and song for all the centuries to hear, you also knew the dark sayings of the prophets about the suffering of the servant of God in this world. Shining over his birth in the stable at Bethlehem, there were angels in splendour who brought the good news to the shepherds, but at the same time the lowliness of God in this world was all too palpable. The old man Simeon spoke to you of the

sword which would pierce your soul (cf. *Lk* 2:35), of the sign of contradiction that your Son would be in this world. Then, when Jesus began his public ministry, you had to step aside, so that a new family could grow, the family which it was his mission to establish and which would be made up of those who heard his word and kept it (cf. *Lk* 11:27f). Notwithstanding the great joy that marked the beginning of Jesus's ministry, in the synagogue of Nazareth you must already have experienced the truth of the saying about the "sign of contradiction" (cf. *Lk* 4:28ff). In this way you saw the growing power of hostility and rejection which built up around Jesus until the hour of the Cross, when you had to look upon the Saviour of the world, the heir of David, the Son of God dying like a failure, exposed to mockery, between criminals. Then you received the word of Jesus: "Woman, behold, your Son!" (*Jn* 19:26). From the Cross you received a new mission. From the Cross you became a mother in a new way: the mother of all those who believe in your Son Jesus and wish to follow him. The sword of sorrow pierced your heart. Did hope die? Did the world remain definitively without light, and life without purpose? At that moment, deep down, you probably listened again to the word spoken by the angel in answer to your fear at the time of the Annunciation: "Do not be afraid, Mary!" (*Lk* 1:30). How many times had the Lord, your Son, said the same thing to his disciples: do not be afraid! In your heart, you heard this word again during the night of Golgotha. Before the hour of his betrayal he had said to his disciples: "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (*Jn* 16:33). "Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid" (*Jn* 14:27). "Do not be afraid, Mary!" In that hour at Nazareth the angel had also said to

you: "Of his kingdom there will be no end" (*Lk* 1:33). Could it have ended before it began? No, at the foot of the Cross, on the strength of Jesus's own word, you became the mother of believers. In this faith, which even in the darkness of Holy Saturday bore the certitude of hope, you made your way towards Easter morning. The joy of the Resurrection touched your heart and united you in a new way to the disciples, destined to become the family of Jesus through faith. In this way you were in the midst of the community of believers, who in the days following the Ascension prayed with one voice for the gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Acts* 1:14) and then received that gift on the day of Pentecost. The "Kingdom" of Jesus was not as might have been imagined. It began in that hour, and of this "Kingdom" there will be no end. Thus you remain in the midst of the disciples as their Mother, as the Mother of hope. Holy Mary, Mother of God, our Mother, teach us to believe, to hope, to love with you. Show us the way to his Kingdom! Star of the Sea, shine upon us and guide us on our way!

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 30 November, the Feast of Saint Andrew the Apostle, in the year 2007, the third of my Pontificate.

Cases and Inquiries

JAVIER GONZÁLEZ, OP

SHRINE RECTORS: APPOINTMENT, FUNCTIONS AND OBLIGATIONS

QUESTION:

In the process of drafting the statutes of a soon-to-be national shrine we outlined some articles to be devoted to the appointment, authority, rights and "job description" of the shrine Rector. We realized, however, that the Code of Canon Law does not expressly contain those juridical features. We tried to look up at some canonical indexes and vocabularies, but most of them simply referred back to the voice "Shrines." Would it be possible to formulate some basic provisions regarding the appointment and the main functions and obligations of shrine rectors in accordance with the Code of Canon Law?

ANSWER:

The Code of Canon Law indeed contains some provisions on shrines, specifically their definition (c.1230), kinds

(c. 1231), statutes directives (c. 1232), privileges (c. 1233), and religious services and votive offerings (c. 1234). However, it does not contain the above mentioned juridical futures on shrine rectors. As a matter of fact, the "rectors of shrines" are expressly mentioned in the Code of Canon Law only once, where canon 1232 §2 states that "the statutes of a shrine are to determine principally its purpose, *the authority of the rector,* and the ownership and administration of its property."

However, the shrine rector's office, being an ecclesiastical one, is ruled by the universal law of the Church as well as by the legitimately approved statutes of each shrine. Thus, we must have recourse to such law and statutes – especially to the parallel places in the Code that deal with "Rectors of churches" (cc. 556-563) and with "Parish priests" (cc. 515-552) – in order to describe the main juridical and pastoral features (appointment and cessation, obligations and rights, etc. ...) of shrine rectors, applying those canons analogically.

1. Shrine Rector: Concept and Appointment

A shrine rector is here understood as the priest to whom the pastoral care of a shrine has been lawfully entrusted by the competent ecclesiastical authority. His appointment, together with the determination of the duration of his term and the obligations attached to it, is to be determined in the proper statutes of the shrine. Said statutes are to be approved by the local Ordinary (in the case of diocesan shrines), by the Episcopal Conference (in the case of national shrines) or by the Apostolic See (in the case of international shrines).

Shrines by canonical definition are sacred places, normally churches, which by reason of special devotion are frequented by the faithful as pilgrims, and that have ecclesiastical approval. (cf c. 1230) These churches, often also parochial churches, have then one and the same person in charge of both entities (unless in some particular cases circumstances advised otherwise.)

The Bishop of the diocese where the shrine is freely appoints the shrine rector. He also, who will also determine the period of time of the appointment in accordance with the benefit of stability (cf c. 522) and the provisions of the local episcopal conference. If the church belongs to some clerical religious institute of pontifical right, the diocesan Bishop appoints as rector the person presented by the religious Superior (c. 557).

The local Ordinary may also appoint one or more assistant to the rector for a specified period of time. The rector on his part should appoint the members of the pastoral and economic councils for a determined period of time, normally of two or three years, renewable.

2. Functions and Obligations of the Rector

The rector's authority as well as his obligations and rights must be detailed in the proper statutes of the shrine (cf c. 1232 §2). These elements describe the shrine rectors' main functions, both pastoral and administrative.

a) Pastoral functions

The shrine rector's pastoral obligations matches in principle with the functional priorities assigned to shrines

by canon law, which in reality are summarized in the obligation "to make more abundantly available to the faithful the means of salvation: by sedulous proclamation of the word of God; by suitable encouragement of liturgical life, especially by the celebration of the Eucharist and penance; and by the fostering of approved forms of popular devotion" (c. 1234 §2).

Hence the preaching of the word of the God, complemented by catechesis, must occupy a place of priority in any shrine rector's ministry. Likewise the encouragement of liturgical life, above all the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, whose solemnity, inculturation, faithful observance of the liturgical norms and exemplary manner in which it is carried out should inspire imitation in other churches. This applies also to the practice of liturgical prayer, the administration of the sacrament of Reconciliation, and the promotion of the faithful/pilgrims' active participation in the ecclesial community life. Finally, he has the duty to foster approved forms of popular devotion "in such a way that they do not become distortions of religion or remain superficial forms of worship, but become rather true expressions of faith" (Vatican II). This exercise is subject to the care and judgment of the bishops and to the general norms of the Church.

In addition to these liturgical functions, shrine rectors have also other pastoral obligations springing from the peculiar mission (purpose) shrines have of being beacons of the new evangelization, places of ecumenical dialogue, hearths of charity, centers of advocacy for human and Christian renewal. In each of these dimensions the shrine rector finds sketched important challenges, both personal

and pastoral, from which corresponding obligations flow. Shrine rectors are also to be concerned with the proper character or "charism" of their own shrine (i.e., the main reason why pilgrims frequent that particular shrine) as well as with the specific needs of the faithful/pilgrims.

When a shrine is at the same time a parochial church the appointments as rector and as parish priest normally fall on the same person, although it does not have to be necessarily so. Thus if the rector is also the parish priest, he should carry out the functions proper to parish priests, in accordance with canons 515-539. If, however, the rector and the parish priest are different persons, then the respective competences and pastoral obligations of each one should be clearly determined in the proper statutes, not only to guarantee the good coordination of pastoral services, but also to avoid possible conflicts of any kind, from spiritual to administrative. In such case, care should be exerted in establishing the liturgico-pastoral functions that need the permission of the parish priest (enumerated in canon 558, numbers 1-6), and those by themselves allowed to the shrine rector, which in reality would be, according to canon 1219, "all acts of divine worship..., *without prejudice to parochial rights*" (i.e., those which are in contradiction with the fundational laws or which hinder the parochial ministry.)

When the shrine is not a parochial seat, the pastoral responsibilities of the church would fall directly on the rector, who would then have to be the one to give [or to refuse] permissions to celebrate the Eucharist, to administer the sacraments or to perform other sacred functions in the church (c. 561). The mere fact of not being

a parish church would require on the part of the shrine rector and staff a peculiar planning of assistance to the pilgrims.

The general duty of the rector is also to ensure that nothing is done which in any way will be unbecoming to the holiness of the place and to the reverence due to the house of God. In this and other affairs he could be helped by his assistants, who should act in accordance with canons 546-552, complemented by local customs and practices.

b) Administrative functions

In addition to their pastoral functions, shrine rectors have also others, administrative in character, coming from their being the "property custodians" and responsible for the administration of the shrine properties.

This administrative responsibility belongs directly to the rector, who may carry it out either personally or, under his direction, through another person appointed by the local Ordinary, always duly assisted by the finance council. In any case the properties and temporal goods of the shrine are to be carefully administered, in accordance with the provisions of canon law (cf cc. 540 and 1254-1310) and the regulations of the shrine statutes. The rector is to perform his duties with the diligence of a good householder, being vigilant that no goods placed under his care in any way perish or suffer damage; to this end he is to safeguard them in ways which are also valid in civil law.

One of the provisions that must appear in the statutes of any shrine is the duty of rectors, from the beginning of their office, to draw up a clear and accurate inventory of the properties and goods belonging to the shrine, either

together with the properties of the parochial church, or separated if the local Ordinary had so decided. Such inventory must contain a list of all immovable goods, of those movable goods which are precious or of high cultural values, and of all other goods, with the description and an estimate value of each item. Two certified copies of this inventory, signed by the rector, are to be kept: one in the administrator's office and the other in the curial archive. Care should be exerted that any pertinent change in the property be noted in both copies.

It is likewise important that the statutes determine the shrine's competence (and of the parish to it attached, if that were the case) on matters of vigilance, building maintenance and administration of goods, making sure that both entities (shrine and parish) appear as distinct juridical persons with separate administrations. The rector should periodically render account of his administration to the diocesan bishop and to the diocesan finance council.

In the case of a shrine-parish entrusted to a religious institute or to a clerical society of apostolic life the signing of an agreement between the religious institution and the competent ecclesiastical authority will be necessary.

3. Cessation in the Rector's office

The shrine rector's office is lost, as any other ecclesiastical office, either on the expiry of the predetermined time; on reaching the age limit defined by law; by resignation; by transfer; by removal; or by deprivation (c.184). (It is not lost on the expiry, in whatever way, of the authority of the one by whom it was conferred, unless the law provides otherwise.)

If the office had been conferred *ad nutum* of the person who appointed him, the rector could be removed by the same authority at any moment without the need of any process. If the rector were a member of a religious institute or were incardinated in a society of apostolic life, he "can be removed from the office at the discretion of the authority who made the appointment, with prior notice being given to the religious Superior; or by the religious Superior, with prior notice being given to the appointing authority. Neither requires the other's consent." (c. 682 §2) In case of administrative recourse, if the rector believed that he had been injured, canons 1732-1739 should be observed, the final decision corresponding to the Congregation for the Clergy, under whose competence shrines are placed. (cf *Pastor Bonus,* 97, 1°)

4. Other related norms

To the shrine rector's office should also be applied *servando de iure servandis* all canonical provisions regarding matters directly or indirectly related with it, giving priority to whatever may contribute to meet the pastoral needs of the faithful/pilgrims.

Sunday Homilies for March-April 2008

March 2, 2008
4TH SUNDAY OF LENT (LAETARE SUNDAY)
Readings: 1 Sam 16:1, 6-7, 10-13; Eph 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

JUDGMENT OUR SALVATION by Mark Edney, O.P.

Jesus says in today's gospel: *It is for judgment that I have come into this world.*

For many people this may not seem like good news. Their hearts and memories will be too filled already with the burden of guilt, the often unconfessed but still real sense of their own unworthiness and failure.

What need have they for someone, be it the Son of God and the Light of the world, to come tell them what they already know themselves? Better if things remain as they are. Better if the depths of our pasts keep their murky secrets.

Better to struggle on through the shades between light and dark, in that twilight existence between self-knowledge and self-deceit. Better – when it comes down to it – if things remain as they are. Perhaps better finally if He hadn't come into the world at all ... if, that is, He came for judgment.

Christians don't talk much anymore of Jesus as Judge. Talk like that seems to provoke fear and trembling rather than love and trust, and to love and trust we know Our Lord calls us in discipleship. Judgment recalls images of hellfire and damnation.

But perhaps that's because we don't really let Jesus be the Judge. The fear we harbor for his judgment may be only the trembling we feel before our own judgment of ourselves and others or theirs of us. When we begin to see that, we may come to welcome another judge and so also Him who came into our world for judgment.

The story of the healing of the blind man begins with the disciples' question to Jesus about blame. They ask him whose sin has caused it to be that this man has been blind from birth. It was common at the time to believe that for every affliction someone had to be guilty. "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" the disciples ask.

We can easily imagine the blind man in all his years of blindness asking himself the same question. Somebody must be to blame.

Is it I?

It's natural to ask why bad things happen to people. Sadly, it's natural also to look for someone to blame.

Often we let the blame fall on ourselves. That's why we need judgment.

Jesus restores the sight of the blind man, but only after passing judgment. He has come first as Judge. Of the blind man he said, *Neither he nor his parents sinned.*

Sometimes what we need to know most is that we are not to blame.

Sometimes it's others, however, who would keep us blinded by their judgments. This is the case with the Pharisees in our Gospel. They have already passed judgment on Jesus: *For our part, we know that this man is a sinner.*

Through their successive interrogations, they are asking the man who had been healed to accept their judgment on Jesus and perhaps also his society's on himself. When he refuses, they pass judgment on him as well: ... *you a sinner through and through, since you were born.*

The Pharisees not only drive him away but would cast him back into agonizing about his own or someone else's guilt for the way he was born. We need the light of Jesus' judgment to penetrate not only the dark judgments we pass on ourselves but those others pass on us as well.

It is a common enough principle of law that no one should act as their own judge. It is supposed that one would be too inclined to judge their own case favorably.

This would not necessarily be so for the blind man in a society that needed someone to blame for his affliction. It would not be so either where people have become long habituated to self-deceit rather than self-knowledge.

Jesus offers the Pharisees, just as he had given the blind man, the insight of His judgment, but because they think they already see clearly, he tells them, *Your guilt remains.*

It is they finally who are left where they would have the left the blind man – in their guilt. The Gospel leaves us in little doubt that self-judgment is often the surest path to self-condemnation. That's not what Jesus is about, for he came *not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. (John* 3:17).

The blind man comes to faith after Jesus judges. Far from an attitude of fear and trembling Christians might come to see that it is through His judgment that we shall be saved.

Fr. Mark Edney is Syndic of the Province of England.

March 9, 2008
5TH SUNDAY OF LENT
Readings: Ezekiel 37:12-14; Romans 8:8-11; John 11:1-45

NEW LIFE AND OLD by Robert Pollock, O.P.

Today's gospel describes an encounter between the Christ and the sisters of the dead Lazarus.

Encounters with God abound in the Scriptures. Each one is the occasion of a new way of seeing and understanding, of exploring on a deeper level the story of salvation, and our place in it.

Each of the gospel readings for the first four Sundays of Lent also described encounters: between the Christ and the devil in the desert, with the disciples on the mountain, with the woman at the well, and with the man born blind.

In each of these encounters something important emerged: in the desert the Christ expressed the true nature of sonship, on the mountain the disciples learned the true nature of discipleship, the woman at the well saw more deeply into living water, and the blind man taught us to understand the deeper nature of seeing.

Today's gospel reading, which marks the passing of the mid-way point of Lent, is linked to the preceding gospel readings, but points us towards Easter, with its themes of death and resurrection, and offers a new, Christian understanding of death.

Several important ideas are used in this gospel passage: life, death, love and faith. As the story unfolds, these ideas take on a new and deeper meaning. Jesus *loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.*

When the sisters sent a message to the Christ, Lazarus is described as 'the man you love'. They made a claim on the Christ, based not only on friendship, but on the much stronger bond, love.

When the Christ arrived at the house, Lazarus has died. An important conversation takes place between him and Martha. Even though she grieves at the loss of her brother, she expresses her faith and trust in the Christ: *If you had been here, my brother would not have died.*

She seemed to accept that Lazarus was dead, something final which could not be challenged or undone, but she again expresses her faith by saying: *But I know that, even now, whatever you ask of God, he will grant you.*

Martha was asking that Lazarus be restored to life. The Christ then moves the discussion on to a different level: *Your brother will rise again.*

To which Martha replies, *I know that he will rise again on the last day.*

The Christ replies, *I am the resurrection. If anyone believes in me, even though he dies he will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.*

He then invites Martha to assent to this, which she does. The condition of Lazarus being restored to life is faith in the resurrection.

Lazarus is brought back to life; he is not given new life, but the same life as he had before his death, with the same conditions and limitations, with death coming inevitably. But on the deeper level on which the Christ speaks, another kind of life is foretold.

Death would seem to be an end, final. This idea is challenged, and changed in the gospel. Our Lord was speaking of himself, and what he would achieve and bequeath to mankind by his death and resurrection.

He was on his way to Jerusalem, where, in obedience to the will of the Father, and out of love for the Father, he would die, and rise again, but in a way quite different from Lazarus. The seeming finality of death disappeared, and something greater and grander was born.

Our Lord was promising another kind of life, for which death was a preparation. Death is not an end, a finality, but the condition of passing into another kind of life, which is unbounded, has no limitations, eternal life with God.

By his death and resurrection the Christ offered to those who believe the reality of this new life. Lazarus did not receive new life, he was restored to his old life; the risen Christ brought a new kind of life, the old life gives way to a new life.

We express this truth this in the preface of the Mass for the Dead, when we celebrate the death of a Christian; life is changed, not taken away.

Fr. Robert Pollock is a member of the Dominican community in Glasgow.

March 16, 2008
PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD
Readings: Matt 21:1-11; Isa 50:4-7; Phil 2:6-11;
Matt 26:14-27:66

A DISTURBING ENTRANCE by Colin Carr, O.P.

A person gets remembered in all sorts of different ways: no two people will have exactly the same memories, but their different memories will build up a whole picture which gets more interesting the more it is added to.

Many different people wrote about Jesus in the decades after his death. Four accounts of his life and teaching, his death and resurrection, are found in the Christian scriptures. They're interestingly similar and they're interestingly different.

I want to look at three things which Matthew's gospel says about Jesus' last days – things which the other accounts don't mention.

The first is that Jesus came riding into Jerusalem not on one donkey but on two – a donkey and a colt. The disciples laid their cloaks on *them;* Jesus sat on *them.* And the result was that the whole city was in turmoil. Matthew stresses that this is a fulfillment of an ancient prophecy that Zion's king would come riding *on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.*

These days the scholars insist that Matthew was reading the prophecy too literally, that the prophet had only referred to one animal: it was a donkey, and, to be

precise, a colt; just as we might say: *She's a tennis player, and a very good tennis player too.*

Maybe the prophet did originally have only one animal in mind; but Matthew's gospel was written by someone who reflected deeply on the way Jesus made the old prophecies come alive, and who noted that when Jesus did fulfill an ancient prophecy, he caused a stir.

Perhaps he wanted to stress how very humble Jesus' view of kingship was – ludicrously humble, we might say. Perhaps the parent donkey and the foal represented for him the old and the new which Jesus held together in his teaching and his life; he wasn't averse to allegories.

But for Matthew, above all Jesus was fulfilling what had been promised by God's seers in the past. He was responding to a destiny and a vocation which might have uncomfortable consequences and might cause a stir, but so be it. The promise to Abraham was accompanied by a command to go precariously into the unknown; it was being fulfilled by the humble king who rode precariously towards his deadly throne.

A second incident which only Matthew records is the message which Pilate's wife sent to Pilate as he was sitting on his judgment seat; he was trying, rather feebly, to do justice. His wife tried to influence him to leave well alone – to dismiss the case: she had been suffering all day because of a dream about this just man, Jesus.

Pilate knew that the motives of Jesus' accusers were not good; his wife insisted Jesus was innocent; but Pilate was prevailed on by the loud voices of the crowd, and he did what was expedient rather than what was just. The

yells of the crowd were more persuasive than the rather vague voice of a dreamer. Dreams don't rate highly as persuaders in a world of harsh political realities.

The woman who dreamed, and was upset by her dream, didn't seem like a strong advocate for the innocence of Jesus. But it is only people like her who can recognize Jesus for what he is. He appeals to more than just our calculating common sense: he is found by those who are open to their imagination, who are able to be disturbed by him.

The third special contribution of Matthew is the earthquake, the splitting of the rocks and the raising of the saints, who visited the Holy City after Jesus' resurrection. (Don't ask me what they did on Saturday – it's puzzling enough as it is.)

The earth was disturbed – the same word as is used for the disturbance Jesus brought to the city when he rode in on two donkeys. Jesus fulfilled his destiny, and caused a disturbance. Again.

Jesus the disturber came into the city, and the disturbance turned the city against him; he disturbed Pilate's wife through a dream, and she allowed herself to be convinced of his innocence; his death disturbed the rocks which held the dead, and the dead came to life.

Jesus will always be the disturber; we choose whether his troublesome approach will turn us away from him to comfortable expediency, or teach us the truth and bring us life.

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

March 20, 2008
HOLY THURSDAY
Readings: Exo 12:1-8,11-14; 1 Cor 11:23-26; John 13:1-15

THE DEPTHS OF HIS LOVE by Peter Hunter, O.P.

In *Gosford Park,* the relationship between those above and below stairs is very interesting. Those above stairs often treat the servants as if they were completely summed up, defined in who they are, by being servants.

So to be seen cheating on your wife by one of the servants is of no concern, because nobody of any consequence knows about the infidelity but only a servant. One servant echoes this understanding of herself and says, "I am the perfect servant; I have no life."

Needless to say, this relationship of master and servant must be completely loveless while it remains on this level. No one can love a servant simply as a servant. To love someone, you have to see them as a human being, that is, as someone sharing a common life with you, in some way equal to you.

Nevertheless, Christ shows us by his example that being a Christian is precisely about being a servant. Since in baptism we are formed after the image of Christ we could say, I think, that Christians are defined in who they are by being servants.

Naturally, I am not saying that all of us are good at living up to what we've been made to be by our baptism.

We are most of us very poor servants. But we can see, then, that sin is a sort of lie about ourselves. It is a turning away from what we already are in virtue of our baptism, servants of others.

The example of service in English country houses may convince us that thinking of ourselves as servants is not a very good way of understanding ourselves. That is because we are inclined to forget that all the examples of perfectly devoted service are all examples of great love. Since the Gospel is about the washing of the feet, think of a mother bathing her baby. The act of washing the baby is one of service, but also of tender love.

I am told that in Jesus' time, washing of the feet was one way in which a wife might express her love for her husband. Washing his feet showed that his body was to her as precious as her own.

So when Jesus washes the feet of the disciples, he is not just being humble, he is being loving. His washing is a sign of the unity, of the bond, between him and the disciples. They are seen to be not servants but friends.

When Jesus responds to Peter, *If I do not wash you, you have no part in me,* we see the depth of the sign, that it is not simply about Christ showing us humility but an effective sign of the unity of the apostles with Jesus.

That is why St. John can tell us about the washing of the feet in the place where the other Gospels give us the story of the institution of the Eucharist, the command to celebrate the sacrament of his body and blood. The washing of the feet shows us the same thing as we see in the Eucharist but in another way. Jesus brings about

our unity, unity which would be impossible without him. Sin has divided us; only the love of God for us, love which overflows in our love for each other, could unite us.

We discover that the only way human beings can be united is by being united in love, and that the only way of being united in love is being united in Christ. No amount of social tinkering could ever get rid of the divisions that we see in society. I do not mean that social programmes are all unimportant but that they are not enough. As Herbert McCabe says, *the transformation we need if we are to escape destruction is even more radical than revolution; it is forgiveness.*

Holy Week is all about sin, about recognizing its depth and power and so learning not to trivialize it, but also about seeing its overthrow, its defeat. Christ shows us by washing his disciples' feet the path we must take if we are to uproot sin in our lives. We are to show ourselves as servants, not just humble but loving.

This is only possible because God has first loved us. The omnipotent God has become our servant, allowed Himself to be summed up by His service. That is the extent of His great love.

Fr. Peter Hunter teaches philosophy at Blackfriars, Oxford.

March 21, 2008
GOOD FRIDAY
Readings: Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9;
John 18:1-19:42

HE DIED THAT WE MIGHT LIVE by Aelred Connelly, O.P.

Isaiah tells us of the suffering servant: *Ours were the sufferings he bore, ours the sorrows he carried ... By his sufferings shall my servant justify many, taking their faults on himself.*

All the sufferings and sorrows and faults of humanity are in the cup of suffering accepted by Jesus in the garden. Before he is seized and bound like a lamb for the slaughter, he says to Peter, "Am I not to drink the cup the Father has given me?" Having been reproved for his violence, Peter denies that he is Jesus' follower.

Jesus rejects the legitimacy of the violence of the kingdoms of the world. *Mine is not a kingdom of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, my men would have fought to prevent my being surrendered.*

He has rejected the way of Peter's sword, the slap of the High Priest's servant, and his degradation of the crown of thorns and the imperial purple. This shows forth the caricature that human power often is.

The source of all power is from above, from God; hence the irony of Pilate's words to the people, 'Here is your King.' They respond, 'We have no King but Caesar.' God's gift of the real King is given into the power of this

world, and is given back to the people by Caesar's representative, who has tried to free him: *So in the end Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified.*

Jesus has been given back to us so many times. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews reminds us that we have a supreme High Priest who has felt our weaknesses with us. Let us be confident in approaching the throne of grace, that we shall have mercy from him and find grace when we are in need of help.

It was one of the high priestly family who said that it was better for one man to die for the people. And so Jesus dies for all people. He dies as King of the Jews, yet the notice on the cross was in Hebrew, Latin and Greek. He is King of all languages, peoples, times and places. He gives his all for all, even his clothes: *they shared out my clothing among them. They cast lots for my clothes.*

As he dies naked on the cross, his seamless undergarment is a sign of the seamless undergarment of humanity in its suffering and redemption. He gives us to each other at the foot of the cross: *This is your son ... this is your mother.*

He who has freely taken on the cup of suffering humanity, drinks the final vinegar from the hyssop stick: *after Jesus had taken the vinegar, he said, 'It is accomplished,' and bowing his head, he gave up his Spirit.*

With the vinegar he takes to himself the full cup of human suffering and sorrow and sin, and gives forth from his unbroken body the life-giving draught of new life. Instead of breaking his legs, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a lance, and immediately there came out

blood and water. In his death he has given us the life-giving water of baptism and the blood of the Eucharist. He has died that we might live.

We are reminded of the water welling up to eternal life offered to the Samaritan woman, the sight of faith given to the blind man, and the life given back to Lazarus. We are also led back to the mount of Transfiguration, and see that the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets comes with Christ's transformation into glory, which for John takes place on the cross.

They shall look on the one they have pierced.

The body of Jesus is taken away and laid in a tomb in a garden. We are now left with the bare cross, on which to contemplate. God's gift to us has gone into the grave. We are left to view the shameful gibbet of death outside the Law and Temple, and Jerusalem itself, on the place of the Skull.

We come as sinners to the one who *surrendered himself to death, and let himself be taken for a sinner, while he was bearing the faults of many, and praying all the time for sinners.*

As sinners we face the cross, and in the words of today's psalm (30), we trust in the Lord: *Let your face shine on your servant. Save me in your love. Be strong, let your heart take courage, all who hope in the Lord.*

Our hope is in the God of Love, who brought Jesus from death to life, and our hope is in him.

Fr. Aelred Connelly is a member of the Prior of St. Albert the Great, Edinburgh.

March 23, 2008
EASTER SUNDAY
Readings: Gen 1:1-2:2; Gen 22:1-18; Exodus 14:15-15:6, 15:17-18; Isaiah 54:5-14; Isaiah 55:1-11; Bar 3:9-15, 3:32-4:4; Ezekiel 36:16-28; Romans 6:3-11; Matthew 28:1-10

PREACHING THE RESURRECTION by Fergus Kerr, O.P.

Go quickly and tell his disciples, "He has been raised from the dead," the angel of the Lord tells the women when they see the tomb empty; *Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee,* Jesus himself tells them as he meets them on the way and they worship him: *there they will see me.*

The last we heard of his disciples, his brothers, in Matthew's gospel, is their failure to stay awake with him at Gethsemane, Judas Iscariot's betrayal of him, and Simon Peter's denial of all knowledge of him. They were absent at Golgotha.

On the other hand, *many women were there, looking on from distance,* women who 'had followed Jesus from Galilee and ministered to him' (Matthew 27:55-56), including Mary Magdalene and the other Mary who found the tomb empty and were charged with taking the news that he was risen from the dead to the disciples, his brothers, and instructing them to go to Galilee.

The way Matthew tells the story means he must want us to see the contrast between the disciples who had abandoned him or worse, and the women followers

who kept watch while he died, who were there when Joseph of Arimathea laid the body of Jesus in the tomb, and were the first to visit the tomb.

These women's faithfulness, their vigil at the tomb, meant that they were there; available to be sent to call the disciples together, with the news of his resurrection and the promise that they would see him in Galilee.

Matthew concludes with the disciples gathered on the mountain in Galilee, with the risen Lord Jesus sending them out with all authority to make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching them to do as he commanded. Thus he sends the disciples out, to continue his mission, in effect to form the church – the very disciples who failed him now brought together as his apostles, brought together however through the mission he gave to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary.

Commissioned by the angel to take the news of Jesus' resurrection from the dead to his disciples, commanded by Jesus himself to tell his brothers to gather in Galilee to see him, these two women are the first to hear of his resurrection, and the first to adore Jesus as Lord.

Originally, historically, Matthew is saying, faith in Jesus as Lord already existed in these women – before the apostles ever began to preach. Indeed, these women's recognition of Jesus as Lord happened on their way to calling the disciples together to become the apostolic community.

Nothing much is recorded in the gospels that does not have a further dimension, a prophetic trajectory. The

gathering of the disciples on the mountain to receive Christ's authority to baptize and teach is Matthew's way of telling us that the apostles and their successors in the church have the risen Lord's authority to preach and baptize.

But what Matthew is also telling us is that the apostolic community was constituted, so to speak, by receiving the news of the resurrection and the command to regroup from someone else, from these women in fact, who prayed as he died, who kept vigil by his tomb, who met him on the way, who had seen the risen Lord for themselves.

Those who preach in the Lord's name, with his authority, do so in response to a summons from people who have already encountered the risen Lord Jesus. One of the things a preacher learns, one of the things I have begun to learn in forty years of preaching, is that a preacher has nothing to tell people that they have not already seen (beware of preachers who tell you things you have never heard before!).

There is no preaching of the resurrection which does not resonate with the faith that is already in the listeners' hearts. 'Christ is risen' is the message the authorized preachers have to proclaim; but it is a message they receive from others – from all the other disciples for whom Jesus is always already Lord.

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

March 30, 2008
2ND SUNDAY OF EASTER
Readings: Acts 2:42-47; 1 Pet 1:3-9; John 20:19-31

EXPERIENCING THE RISEN WORD by Aidan Nichols, O.P.

In the First Eucharistic Prayer we profess that our faith 'comes to us from the apostles'. Today in the Gospel we have an example of what this means, one of the situations where the risen Christ showed himself to the apostles – mysteriously but truly.

Our faith depends – in one sense – on the trustworthiness of stories like these, on the reliability of the apostles, the people who to their amazement and joy saw the risen Lord. Is our faith, then, really faith in other people, as fallible as ourselves (so we might think) and a good deal less educated? Actually, no. Our faith is in God alone: faith is assent to God and trust in him.

Yet the truth of God to which faith responds is mediated by the frail fabric of human testimony: 'Go and tell his disciples and Peter'; 'The Lord has arisen and has appeared to Simon'; 'Their eyes were opened and they knew him in the breaking of the bread'; 'We have seen the Lord'.

We know how the people who said or wrote these words were changed overnight. From defeat and disillusion with the 'Jesus movement', they became men and women who could turn the world of their day upside down. Our

faith depends in a sense on their authority, in the original meaning of that word – which is being trustworthy at source, being reliable from the very word go.

The Catholic understanding of the Church takes all this for granted. Faith involves us in tradition – Gospel witness handed down from one generation to the next. This witness is present first of all in Scripture. It is expressed in a variety of ways in Church life from sacred art to the holiness of the saints. It is guarded and interpreted by the living voice of the Pope and Bishops. Faithfulness to what has been received from the past is all-important for us: passing on the 'deposit', the Faith once delivered to the saints – which means, first and foremost, the apostles.

This sense of passing on a precious witness has been so strong in Catholicism that it has sometimes swamped what should be the complementary sense that we ourselves – the living – are also meant to be direct witnesses ourselves. Not that we can put ourselves back into Galilee or Jerusalem in the year 33. But nonetheless we are meant to experience something of the realities the Gospel describes.

In the early part of the twentieth century, when claims arose along these lines that were over-inflated, Church authority became suspicious of the idea of 'Christian experience' (the special case of the saints and duly recognized visionaries apart). Surely the Christian's chief responsibility is to obey the Word of God by faith, not to seek out subjective experiences? Yet faith does involve us in experience, it involves a contact with God, with Christ, with the Holy Spirit, with the realities of the New Testament. Prayer, the sacraments, the use of the

Christian imagination under grace in everyday living: all these are or can be experiential contact with the risen Christ. We too are meant to say in some sense, 'We have seen the Lord'.

The peace, joy and forgiveness of the risen Christ brought to the disciples gathered in the Cenacle on the first Low Sunday, these he brings secretly within reach of us all in the Easter Communions of our own 'cenacles' – the churches and chapels where we worship, and the inner room of our own hearts. All ages are open to God – including our own. The Church's doctrine, and, more widely, the revelation of which doctrine is the expression, makes possible just such experience – the kind of experience that is distinctively Christian and Catholic.

After the Catholic Crisis of the twentieth century, our task now, in the twenty-first, is to recover our sense of the sovereignty of the Word of God whose truth is found in Scripture as interpreted by the Church – not, however, over against Christian experience but precisely as making that experience possible, in tandem with our own human contribution via imagination, reason, feeling. In a word, via all the ways our human experience comes to be.

Fr. Aidan Nichols, a well-known writer and theologian, is John Paul II Visiting Lecturer at the University of Oxford.

April 6, 2008
3RD SUNDAY OF EASTER
Readings: Acts 2:14, 22-28; 1 Pet 1:17-21; Luke 24:13-35

SEEING AND BELIEVING by David Goodill, O.P.

You can't help feeling sorry for Dr. Watson as his friend Sherlock Holmes explains his latest piece of deduction. A stranger appears at Baker Street and Holmes reveals facts about them that astound and amaze. Later Holmes explains to Watson how he arrived at these conclusions, stressing that he possesses no special powers of observation but is merely putting into practice basic abilities of observation and deduction. For Holmes the amazing thing is that most of us fail to understand what is staring us in the face.

The problem is not one of sight: Watson sees exactly what Holmes sees. Nor is the problem one of intelligence, we are told that Watson is a successful doctor and his powers of medical deduction are second to none. So why can Holmes perform these amazing feats of deduction that leave Watson (and the rest of us) in awe?

Firstly, he has spent years training his mind. Just as Watson is a highly trained doctor, so Holmes has trained himself in the art of deduction. Secondly, Holmes has a keen interest in humanity. This strange solitary figure has few friends, but has a profound knowledge of and sympathy for human beings, from the most powerful to the very poorest. Thirdly, the science of deduction made

famous by Holmes is not deduction in a strict logical sense. Many of his most brilliant pieces of deduction involve the use of the imagination to make connections most of us fail to see.

Just as we feel sorry for Watson so in many ways we might feel sorry for the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. As they walk along Jesus joins them, but we are told that 'something prevented them from recognising him.' The problem here is not one of seeing: Jesus isn't veiling himself to suddenly shine forth in his glory. No, the problem is that the disciples fail to understand what they are seeing. The risen Jesus is at their side, but their minds are closed to him and they will need Jesus to lead them step by step until they understand who he is.

Just as Holmes reproaches Watson for failing to understand what he is seeing, so Jesus calls the two disciples 'foolish men'. He has trained them throughout his ministry to understand the teachings of the prophets that 'the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory', so he patiently explains to them the scriptures concerning himself.

What the scriptures reveal is that in Christ God reveals the depth of his love and concern for every person, especially for those who are poor. What seems like failure to the two disciples, and the end of all hope, is the source of all hope and the shining forth of God's glory.

For all this careful explanation of the scriptures the two disciples still fail to recognize Jesus. The evidence is before them but they still cannot make the necessary connection; they lack imagination. Their minds are so weighed down with the violence of the crucifixion that

they cannot imagine how God can bring new life from death. So Jesus gives them a sign, a sign that he has invested with a special meaning at the last supper: 'He took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them.'

The sign is a very basic sign, but one that has a powerful effect on the two disciples and we are told that 'their eyes were opened and they recognized him.' The sign was his gift to them, just as it is his gift to all of us raising the imagination so that we see the reality of what lies in front of our eyes.

When we read the Emmaus story what strikes us as amazing is not that the two disciples finally recognize Jesus, but that they fail to do so in the first place. We know the end of the story and wonder how the two disciples could fail to recognize such an obvious conclusion. Yet how often in our lives do we fail to recognize the presence of Christ? More often than not we're more like Watson than Sherlock Holmes, wandering through life focused on our own concerns, unable to see what should be perfectly obvious.

If fact, on our own, none of us has the ability to see the presence of Christ; the sight of faith is Christ's gift to us. What we learn in the Emmaus story is that the gift works through the scriptures and the Holy Eucharist, which use memory and imagination to raise the mind, so that we understand what we are seeing: Jesus Christ offering his life in love for all people.

Fr. David Goodill, OP is a member of Holy Cross Priory, Leicester, and teaches theology at St. Dominic's School, Stone, Oscott Seminary in Birmingham and at Blackfriars, Oxford.

APRIL 13, 2008
4TH SUNDAY OF EASTER
Readings: Acts 2:24,36-41; 1 Pet 2:20-25; John 10:1-10

WHO IS THE DOORKEEPER? by Edmund Hill, O.P.

The Rabbi of Kotzk surprised some learned men who were visiting him. He asked them: *Where is the dwelling of God?*

They laughed at him: *What a thing to ask! Is not the whole world full of his glory?*

Then he answered his own question: *God dwells wherever man lets him in.*

The Rabbi's piece of wisdom I lifted from *The Blue Guide to the Here and Hereafter,* assembled by Lionel Blue and Jonathan Magonet, who lifted it from Martin Buber. It has given me answer to my own question with today's Gospel, the double parable of the sheepfold.

Jesus tells us who the shepherd is: himself. He tells us who the door of the sheepfold stands for: himself. But he doesn't tell us who the doorkeeper is. The Kotzke Rabbi gives me one answer here: it's you and me, any one of the sheep inside or outside the sheepfold.

We are told, after all, that his sheep know the shepherd's voice and follow him. Presumably the doorkeeper too knows his voice when he stands at the door and knocks. So it makes sense to say that the doorkeeper is one of the sheep, one of us.

So do we let the good Shepherd in, when he comes and knocks on our doors? There are others knocking too, thieves and robbers, and possibly hirelings, the allurements of fashion, the promptings of ambition, the pointers to the easy way out.

These we have too often, perhaps, let in through the door, in case they should take the roofs off our houses and climb in over the walls. Will the good Shepherd find them still in possession when at last we open the door to him? Not if we let him in through himself, who *is* the door of the sheepfold.

In what form can he be the door of the sheepfold? In the form of Christ crucified, spreading his arms wide, like an open door. So we have to let Christ in to our inner selves through the door of faith in Christ, and him crucified.

And when any one of us lets him in to ourselves individually, we also do something towards letting him in to all the other sheep, because our faith in Christ and him crucified, if it works through love, can be very catching.

Then indeed he can lead us all in and lead us all out together, that we may have life, and have it more abundantly; have life here and now in the risen Christ, here and now in his body; have it more abundantly in the resurrection of the dead, when he comes again in glory.

Fr. Edmund Hill is a member of the Priory of St. Michael, Archangel, Cambridge. He is also a consultant translator to the Augustinian Heritage Institute.

April 20, 2008
5TH SUNDAY OF EASTER
Readings: Acts 6:1-7; 1 Pet 2:4-9; John 14:1-12

GOOD OLD DAYS? by Isidore Clarke, O.P.

There's a great danger of looking back with nostalgia to the 'Good Old Days', especially as we advance in years. I can say this, because recently I celebrated my seventieth birthday. We tend to think that the past was better than the present, and we can become fearful that the decline will continue in the future.

Certainly there was much that was good in the past. We were in the prime of youth, and now the years have taken their toll. But we also tend to edit our memories and forget what was bad in the past.

Those who extol the Victorian Values of the Industrial Revolution – the inventiveness of the entrepreneur – overlook the human cost in the appalling conditions of labor. In contrast, working conditions are now far better, and medicine has made an enormous improvement in our health.

Today's first reading sparked off these thoughts. There's a great danger of idealizing the Infant Church. The Acts of the Apostles tells us that the Christian community was of one mind and heart, and held everything in common. Certainly there was the enthusiastic zeal which you would expect of any recently formed group. And this was fired by the Holy Spirit.

But as you read the Acts of the Apostles and Paul's letters, you soon realize that all was not sweetness and light. Some conservative Jewish converts tried to undermine Paul's mission to the pagans. And he had such a disagreement with Barnabas that they could no longer work together. Two incompatible saints!

Again, the Church in Corinth, which Paul himself had founded, was torn by feuding factions and caused him great sorrow. Everything was not peace and harmony among the Christians of Corinth, nor in their relationship with Paul.

In today's first reading we learn of another failure in the life of the early Church in Jerusalem. A very vulnerable section of its community – poor Greek widows – was being neglected. Converts from Judaism overlooked the widows in the daily distribution of food. That showed a serious lack of care and concern, and undermined the unity of the community. Not surprisingly, there were complaints.

This incident should warn us against being starry eyed about the first Christians. But more importantly, when the Church recognized its failure it immediately took steps to remedy the fault. And it used great imagination in finding a solution.

Seven deacons were given the special task of caring for the widows. That released others to concentrate on preaching. By allotting different tasks to different people, the life of the Church developed. What had started as a failure became an opportunity for growth.

That has been the pattern throughout the history of the Church. Certainly holiness is one of the essential marks

of the Church, as providing us with the means to sanctity, and in fact producing great saints.

Nevertheless, the Church's members are all flawed. We are sinners, and have blind spots about our faults. But under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, reformers have opened our eyes to our failures. This has led to the community developing imaginative solutions, sometimes new ministries.

This is much more than filling in the gaps; having to find new solutions to fresh problems provides an opportunity for positive development in the life of the Church. More people are enabled to use the variety of their talents in the service of God. We've seen that happen in our own day.

And we must expect this process to continue in the future. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the Church should recognize new needs and may find unexpected solutions. That's a sign of its vitality – not by trying to recapture an idealized past, which never existed.

Although this can create unsettling uncertainty, we can be confident that the Holy Spirit will continue to guarantee that any development in the Church will be consistent with its nature, not a betrayal.

Today's first reading shows us that our very failures can become the spring-board to future progress. That's encouraging and exciting!

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

April 27, 2008
6TH SUNDAY OF EASTER
Readings: Acts 8:5-8, 14-17; 1 Pet 3:15-18; John 14:15-21

WILD AND WONDERFUL by Euan Marley, O.P.

I was once visiting a friend who was a day patient in a hospital waiting for a scan. As it turned out, the scan was to reveal the lung cancer that would soon kill him.

I had brought communion. He wasn't too keen to receive communion in the circumstances. He was sitting on a chair besides his wife in a very busy corridor, with people coming and going.

We went ahead though with all the prayers, and for the duration of his receiving communion, no one came past us. Everything became very still. My friend received communion with great reverence, as he prepared for his ordeal. God makes his own peace, as I said to him at the time.

As Christians, we associate peace with the presence of God. The still quiet places are where we expect to find God, and the Spirit in particular is associated with peace.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy and peace. *(Gal.* 5:22)

So used are we to associate the Holy Spirit with tranquility, that it comes as a shock to see how often in the Old Testament the Spirit of God is much more seen as a wild presence, a turbulent whirlwind, rather than a gentle breeze.

Samson is taken up by the Spirit of God to work slaughter among the enemies of Israel, Ezekiel is snatched up into the air by the Spirit, and the Psalms talk of the raging wind that God sends among us. *(Ps.* 148:8). Saul is beset by an evil spirit from God.

If we understand this, the passage in the first chapter of Mark, where the Spirit drives Jesus into the desert, is not as surprising as many commentators have thought. This was a more normal view of the Spirit at the time, than the one which the New Testament has taught us.

The Spirit seemed like a wild powerful thing before the incarnation because it is seen as something outside of us. Just as the sins of the chosen people made God appear to be angry, so our own instability makes the Spirit seem more like a storm at sea than a haven of peace.

When John the Baptist in the Gospel of John recognizes Jesus as the Messiah, it's not by the presence of the Spirit as such. That would be nothing new. It's the way that the Spirit comes that is different.

He on whom you see the Spirit descend and stay is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.

The crucial word is 'stay', which speaks of the new stillness and peace which the Messiah alone can reveal. It's a favorite word of John, and it occurs again in today's Gospel.

...the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he stays with you, and will be in you.

It is the Spirit of God, no longer seen as a thing outside us, but as he truly is, the person of God, not a thing at all, but the unchanging stillness of the divine Trinity.

We cannot perceive the Spirit properly, unless we are thereby drawn into the heart of the Trinity. This is how the Spirit conveys something of its peace to the church.

In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

As long as we stay back, the Spirit seems to be spinning and twisting, like Ezekiel's bizarre vision of God:

Wherever the spirit would go, they went, and the wheels rose along with them; for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. (1:20)

It's as if we were born on a merry-go-round, a carousel, and never having left this, we think that the rest of the world is spinning while we remain perfectly still.

At the incarnation, Jesus jumped onto the carousel, and by his death and resurrection jumped back off, just to show us it could be done. The wild spirit beckons us to follow him. If we make that leap, against all expectations, we will find ourselves on the still rock of solid ground, in a place of stillness.

Fr. Euan Marley, O.P. lives at the Priory of the Holy Cross, Leicester, and is Catholic Chaplain to Leicester Royal Infirmary.

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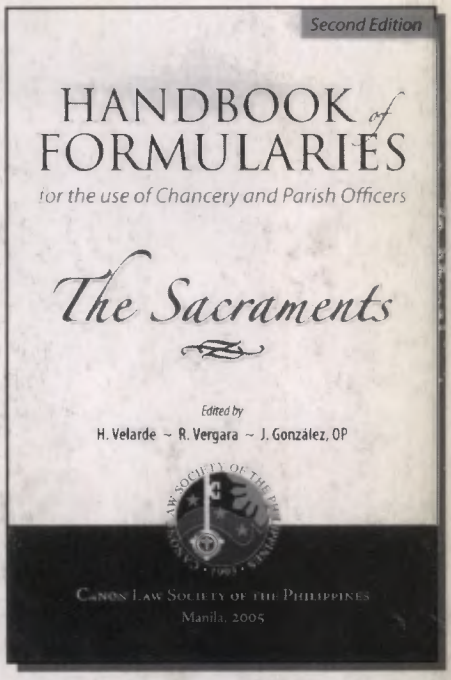

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